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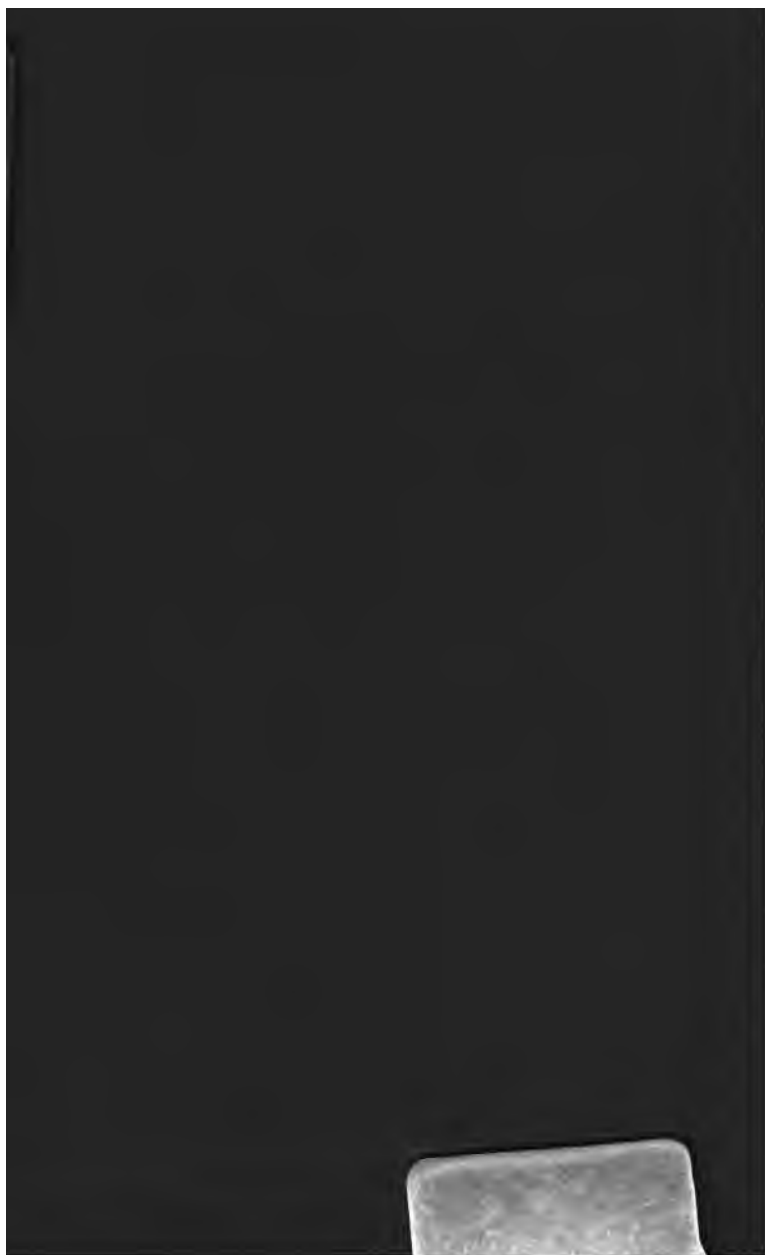
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The
Divine Treatment of Sin.



The Divine Treatment of Sin.

BY

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TO MR. AND MRS. RAFFLES,

DEAR RELATIVES AND FRIENDS,

FOR WHOM I KNOW THAT THIS SUBJECT WILL
HAVE DEEP INTEREST: FOR THE ONE AS A
CHRISTIAN MAGISTRATE, FOR THE OTHER AS A
WISE AND COMPASSIONATE MINISTER TO THE
SICK, THE SUFFERING, AND THE SINFUL

AMONG THE POOR,

I INSCRIBE THESE THOUGHTS ON THE

DIVINE TREATMENT OF SIN.





PREFACE.



IN these pages I offer to the public some thoughts which I have already offered to my own congregation, on what seems to me the problem of problems—the relation which sin sustains to the Divine plan of human development. The course of thought which is here rather sketched than wrought out, may possibly seem to clash in some degree with the tenets of the theological school which has long ruled in the domain of Evangelical Nonconformity. But I am not without hope that the thoughts developed in these pages will receive a candid and kindly consideration, inasmuch as I am firmly persuaded that their tendency is not to confound, but to confirm and establish, all that our hearts cleave to as the essence of the Gospel.

If I claim for the work of Christ an older as well as a wider relation to man than the formularies of

our faith seem to recognize, I believe that I am vindicating a truth on which those formularies themselves are built, and which lends to them their weight and influence with men. I am happy, too, in the conviction that the number is rapidly increasing in our churches, of those to whom the statement of this older and wider relation of the redeeming love and purpose of God in Christ will appear to be "not against the truth, but for the truth" of the Gospel; and who may find here convictions about Divine things which have long haunted their minds brought out to fuller expression, and connected with the great purpose of redemption—which I here treat as the very groundwork of man's life and history.

Happily, too, it is more easy to speak freely and to be judged Christianly, when treating, however imperfectly, yet with honest and reverent heart, of these high matters, than it was when I published the "Divine Life in Man," four years ago.

J. BALDWIN BROWN.

ATKINSON PLACE, BRIXTON,

February, 1864.



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Sermon I.

The Fall Considered as a Development.

“ And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil.”—GENESIS III. 22.

THE Scripture touches but lightly man's life in Eden ; for, the text tells us, it was only through the Fall, and the experience which has sprung from it, that man has grown to the full form of man. “ *And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.*” “ *So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him ; male and female created He them.*” The image was there, perfect in Eden. But it needed yet some touch of the living fire. Man, by one dread act, brought himself into a new and awful relation with the devil on the one hand ; on the other, with

God. Till then, Eden had filled his calm horizon. By that act of freedom he widened its circuit: heaven and hell then passed within his sphere. "*God made man in His own image.*" But the deepest power, the free power, was yet latent. By a dark act of rebellion he developed it; and the Lord God testifies that he had thereby become something which the words "as one of us" alone describe. And yet that act was deadly. Man, aiming at the height of God, fell perilously on the very edge of the abyss. No more awful condition of life, in point of grandeur and power, can be conceived, than the words "become as one of us" set forth; and yet the penalty of aiming at it was death. It was a step out, a step on for man in the unfolding of the latent powers and possibilities of his being as an embodied spirit; but it brought him within peril and under the hand of woes and evils, which have made his history one long wail, and his life one long night. There had been no pause in that wail, no break in that night, but that God met the first transgression with a sentence the heart of which was a promise. Its growing fulfilment has been the thread of light twined in the woof of earth's sad history. God fixed that beam of heavenly light among the threads when the loom was first set moving by that dread act, wherein man asserted a power of will independent of God. That Divine

promise, and not the self-directed exercise of freedom, has made man's life, with all its sins and sorrows, the royal fabric of the King of kings.

Adam, the child of Eden, made in God's image, could find the completeness of his life in Eden. The mould of his being was perfect, as an image; the compass of his powers presented him as the likeness of God in this material world. Adam, the child of the wilderness, having become by the act of freedom that which our text describes—having by the actual experiment of what power might be in him, by the actual unfolding of a life whose character and ends were expressly self-determined, grown into something which, if grander on the one hand than the estate in which he was created in the garden, was most terrible and sorrowful on the other—could find the completeness of his life alone in Christ and heaven. The sinless child could pass his peaceful life in the safe nest and quiet range of an earthly Paradise. To hear the voice of the Lord God among the trees of the garden, and to see His smile playing like the sunlight over his gentle toils, was his supreme satisfaction. For Adam, the exile of Eden, the man who had ventured into the untried world of rebellion against the benign law of the heavenly King, and had begun to taste the fruits of that rebellion in the bitterness of his soul, a higher destiny was open

through grace. Cut off from God, there was but one possible end to his rebellion. He must lie crushed at last under the weight of the system whose order he had violated, the hand whose power he had defied. But if God should pitifully look upon His prodigal, and follow him into the wilderness with forgiving thoughts and the touch of a restoring hand, Adam had become that which was capable, not of presenting the Divine image only, but of partaking the Divine nature, and of entering, as the first Adam never could have entered, into all the high employments and holiest fellowships of heaven.

I must beg you very earnestly to bear in mind that the sentence of our text, pronounced after the transgression, explicitly declares that man had become something different in relation to God, something higher in development if more alien in spirit, than was expressed in the original constitution of the head of our race.

"God made man in His own image," is the original description of the constitution of man. Then follows the dread history which the third chapter of the book of Genesis records; and then it is stated, *"Man is as one of us, knowing good and evil."* The words imply, though they do not express, a growth. Our translators have rightly given the English equivalent to the Hebrew idiom

in the word "become." And the words "as one of us," unquestionably imply a higher condition in point of development, than is expressed in the simple image-bearing which the first chapter of Genesis unfolds. I am well aware that some among the ablest commentators hold that there is keen irony here, the irony of God! Calvin develops the idea with his usual clearness and force. To me, it seems blankly incredible. Herder, too, looking at these solemn old records with the æsthetic eye, has some fine remarks on the irony of some of the most venerable passages of our primeval history. But one can hardly help feeling, in reading his exquisite and finished criticism on the early Hebrew poetry, that another eye, an eye having discernment of deeper things than poetic beauty, is needed here. If this be irony, then we can believe that all life is irony, that all its sorrowful aspirations, hopes, and struggles, are the irony of heaven; and it is but a step further to the conclusion of a powerful and ancient school of Hindu philosophy, that creation—all that seems—is but the sick dream of the Supreme. No! These old words, whatever they may be, are honest; God does not begin in irony that progress which is to lead through Gethsemane and Calvary to Heaven.

Man, then, is said to have grown to something which is in one sense nearer to God, nearer to the

Divine level—and the last clauses of the verse seem to imply that he was within reach of that which would bring him still nearer to the level;—but, on the other hand, there was a new spot of weakness, where he had become vulnerable to foes, whom, in his innocence, he might safely have despised; there was a new element of disorder, which would bring discord and dire confusion into the harmonious sphere of his powers; there was a new taint of decay and death, which, grand as he might seem to have grown by his experiment of freedom, would eat like a canker into his godlike constitution, and unless from Him who made him at the first some renewing, restoring influence should descend, must lay its proud structure in ruins in the dust.

It is from the first the history of the Prodigal. The youngest born, the darling of the father's heart, the joy of his home, choosing to seek the ends of his being away from that home, and in defiance of the father's will; wandering forth into the wilderness, falling inevitably into poverty and straits, level with the beasts, and in peril of a shameful and miserable death. But he is acquiring there, brooding over his experiment of freewill, and tracing out the paths of freedom to their issues, a breadth of knowledge, insight, and conviction, which, should the father in pity receive him to the home again, will make their fellowship richer in interest, joy,

and hope than had been possible under other conditions, and will fill the home with songs more joyous, more triumphant than had ever been heard in Eden. "*It is meet that we should make merry and be glad; for this thy son was dead, but he is alive again; he was lost, but he is found.*"

"*Ye shall be as gods,*" was the devil's promise, "*knowing good and evil.*" The text affirms that there was a truth in it. "*Behold, the man is become as one of us.*" And yet it was a lie to the heart's core. None but God could stand on that Divine level. Man should stand there one day, partaker of the Divine nature. But for the man who in native, naked, human strength should stand there, there could be no issue but death. The devil was right as to the development. Man brought himself into the sphere of higher and more Divine experiences than his life in Paradise could have afforded to him. But the devil said nothing about the death. "*In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return,*" was the disenchantment, which, when Eve clung to the cold lips of Abel, and madly strove to rekindle there the glow of life, became complete. "*Ye shall be as gods!*" That rotting corpse of the beautiful shepherd, the darling of the first human home, was the comment on the devil's

promise. And yet Abel has known something now, of which there was not even a dream in Paradise; and Adam, even through his bitter anguish, rose to a godlike experience; he was able then to comprehend the sorrow with which the heart of the great Father had been filled by His child. The devil said to the prodigal, "Wander freely, spend, enjoy; that is life." The prodigal found it, as every sinner finds it, to be death. What life has come out of it has been born, not of it, but of the strength, the tenderness, the quickening power of the Father's redeeming love.

The life in Eden, as I have said, is touched lightly in the Scripture:—"And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast

of the field: but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him. And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; and the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed." Milton paints out the picture. His conception of the Paradise life is the expansion of the suggestion that man was placed in the garden to dress it and to keep it. The hues with which he paints this beautiful and happy life in Eden have tinged all our notions. It is Milton, who has made the Paradise of our modern English world:—

"So pray'd they innocent, and to their thoughts
Firm peace recover'd soon, and wonted calm.
On to their morning's rural work they haste,
Among sweet dew and flowers: where any row
Offruit-trees over-woody reach'd too far
Their pamper'd boughs, and needed hands to check
Fruitless embraces: or they led the vine
To wed her elm; she, spoused, about him twines
Her marriageable arms, and with her brings
Her dower, the adopted clusters, to adorn
His barren leaves."—*Paradise Lost, Book V.*

“Adam, well may we labour still to dress
This garden, still to tend plant, herb, and flower,
Our pleasant task enjoin'd ; but till more hands
Aid us, the work under our labour grows
Luxurious by restraint ; what we by day,
Lop overgrown, or prune, or prop, or bind,
One night or two with wanton growth derides
Tending to wild. Thou therefore now advise,
Or hear what to my mind first thoughts present :
Let us divide our labours ; thou, where choice
Leads thee, or where most needs, whether to wind
The woodbine round this arbour, or direct
The clasping ivy where to climb ; while I,
In yonder spring of roses intermix'd
With myrtle, find what to redress till noon ;
For, while so near each other thus all day
Our task we choose, what wonder if so near,
Looks intervene and smiles, or object new,
Casual discourse draw on ; which intermits
Our day's work, brought to little, though begun
Early, and the hour of supper comes unearned ?”—*Book IX.*

Looking the subject calmly in the face, do you feel satisfied that this was the life which was meant for man ? Exquisitely beautiful, lovely as a dream, as our memory of childhood's gladdest, sunniest hours, is this vision of Paradise. But still the question presses sternly, as manhood presses on childhood, was it for this that man was made on such a scale of godlike proportion, and endowed with the most awful gift with which God even can endow a son ? To wander pleasantly along the soft glades of a luxuriant garden, to bask on the grassy slopes in the noontide glow, lulled by the hum of joyous life that floats on the languid summer air, plucking

at will the fruits that hang ripe in downy clusters within easy reach of his hand, and exercised by such gentle toils as might prune and chasten the too luxuriant beauty of his bower; lit by the rosy flush of dawn to his daily enjoyments, and by the moon's white cresset to his nightly repose; king in a world in which there could be no collision; nature inanimate, soft and submissive as a bride adorned for her husband, nature animate, an obedient subject at his feet. It is a fair vision; but it is a vision of childhood—man's childhood, and the world's. Thus it was with them, the Scripture says, in their infant days. But man was made for a strain such as no life in a Paradise could put on him. There are in him powers of endurance, of courage, of hope, and of faith, such as no dressing and keeping an Eden could bring into play. Man seems to be so organized inwardly that his purest joys spring out of his sorrows, his riches grow by his losses, his laurels bloom in the sphere of his sternest conflicts, his fullest development is the fruit of his hardest toils, and his noblest becomings of his most utter sacrifices—while God completes the cycle, and ordains that his immortal life shall spring out of his death. Thus man is organized. The question then arises, is this condition of things the accident of sin? Is this the full account of it—that man being in a sinful state,

God has thus adapted his mental and moral organization, as the best expedient which the case allows, with a view to his restoration? Or was this contemplated in his first constitution and endowment? Was man made, were all his powers ordained, with a view to this life of toil, struggle, suffering, sacrifice, and divine experience? Was man made for it? Was the world made for it? Was heaven made for it? Is this the one way through which we are bound to believe that the highest end of God in the constitution of man and of all things is to be gained? And the answer must be, Yes. Man was made for it. Had he remained in Eden, the highest interest of heaven in man's career would have been lost; and more would have been lost, the highest, fullest, most absolute manifestation of God. Him, redemption alone could fully declare. If man comes forth into full manhood through that perverse exercise of his freedom, which leaves human nature suppliant for redemption under peril of imminent death, God, in redeeming man from the penalties and fruits of that perverseness, reveals Himself most fully as God.

The whole system of things around us seems to me to be constituted with a view to redemption—which comprehends the discipline and education of souls. The wilderness was there waiting, and all the physical order of the world. That was before

man, and was made for man. And it is all set to the same key-note of struggle, toil, and suffering. There is not a bit of rock or a blade of grass, there has not been from the creation, which is not a mute memorial of struggle, wounds, and death. All things travail, not simply because man has sinned, but because the redemption of the sinner is the work for which "the all" has been prepared by the Lord. When the Lord looked on from the height of His eternal throne, "to the habitable parts of the earth, and His delights were with the sons of men," was it Eden which He looked on to with solemn joy, or Calvary? Was it glad intercourse which He foresaw with the loyal and loving children of Paradise, or sad, costly, but fruitful communion with the struggling, suffering children of the wilderness? Was it Eden, or Ararat, Canaan, Egypt, Sinai, Jerusalem, Calvary, and Christendom, that His glance comprehended? Was it the fruit of Eden, or the fruit which His tears and blood would win from these, that He then set before His sight? Man and all things were made in concert, to form part of the same great system, of which man's life was to be the key-note, and man himself was to be the head. And the whole system, the whole structure of man and of the world, is moulded to be the theatre of the redemption of the sinner. Not in Eden, but there on Calvary, and in Heaven,

which is the child of Calvary, we see realized the whole idea of God.

Was man, then, made to sin, or so made that sin is guiltless? This is the great question which inevitably arises out of any honest treatment of the text.

Yes! is the answer of a great school of thinkers, who, in every age, have acted powerfully on the beliefs of mankind—the school which has sought “by searching” to find out God and the mystery of His ways. For those who have not seen, or who refuse to see, the light which God sheds on the problem, the help to reason which springs from faith, it is hard to understand how any other answer is possible. Take purely intellectual definitions of God and of His relation to the universe, and there seems to be no room for freedom, and no reality in sin. If man sins, as we call it, according to this school, it is because he must sin. It is the inevitable action of the mechanism of his nature, or as the budding when the sap stirs in the ducts of flowers. Evil and good, fair actions and base, are but the various tones of the many-voiced organ of his being, but one hand in the universe touches them, one breath flows through them all, the hand and breath of Him who worketh all and in all. We are told that we take too narrow ground in our judgments; that sins, even the actions which we most despise and

loathe, will prove, if we give them time enough, like Jacob's tricks, but virtues in the bud. All things, it is said, have somewhat of a bitter tincture in their young bloom or blood, and so, too, hath man. Follies, sins, and crimes, give them time enough for the noontide of experience to purge and ripen them, will fruit in virtues; while each man's contribution, whatever it may be, is essential to the general life, movement, and progress of the world.

This is the argument which philosophy urges; these are the conclusions to which it tends, and in which it endeavours to find rest. You may call it Pantheistic, or what you will, but you do not thereby get rid of it. There it is still, a powerful form of human belief in all ages, and working its poison, more or less triumphantly, through all the leading philosophies of the world.

It is still the dim belief, in this nineteenth century of Christendom, of the vast majority of the human race. And it is not a thing to be puffed down. It is wonderful how many roads of thought, that look specious enough, lead on to it in the end. Nor can it be met by the popular theological notion, that man and the universe having been created on one scheme and with one object, which the accident of man's transgression completely frustrated, all things had to be adapted to a new con-

dition, and to aim at a new and previously unanticipated result.

Redemption is no accident. The need of being a Redeemer lies deep in the nature of God ; and not only was man's sin foreseen, but all things were ordered with a view to the great drama of Redemption, from before the foundation of the world.

But was sin pre-ordained ? The sun was ordained to shine, the moon to embosom and radiate his tempered beams. The flowers were ordained to bloom, the rain to fertilize, the lightning to scathe, the whirlwind to uproot and to destroy. Is it part of the Divine plan of creation, that as the sun shines and the rain descends, some men should blaspheme, and some rob, hate, and murder ? Are these dark shadows of life but the inevitable attendants of its virtues, brought out into sharpest outline where the light is clearest—and their necessary foil ; or else the stages through which God leads the development of nascent virtues, purifying them in the crucible of each as they pass through ? To this question the answer of the Bible, and of the Church is “No ! a thousand times No !” God has set His witness against this in the picture of Eden and the history of the Fall, and to this witness the history of sin adds an emphatic Amen. Man has never been able, in the long run, to shake off the horror which sin inspires, as his own hateful and accursed

work. Responsibility, in the fullest sense which that word will bear, is the broadest, strongest, most insoluble fact in the spiritual history of our race.

"God made man upright, but he has sought out many inventions," and nothing can deliver man from the consciousness that the "*I*" which has sought them out represents something which, whatever it may be, distinctly is not God.

Behind all the solutions which Paganism offers of the mystery of life, there is the one haunting consciousness that man's sinful personality is a self-determining power which, whatever it may be, whencesoever it may come, is not God, and is not necessarily the manifestation of God. I shall have more to say upon the point when I come to speak of the penitent's creed,—"*I have sinned; I have perverted that which is right, and it profited me not,*"—for the present I simply say, that I believe the universal human experience upholds this creed as the absolute truth. Of course it is easy to make broad and bold assertions about universals. A man is prone to find in universal history the theory which he brings to it; but nothing seems to me more broadly marked on the Theism, and even on the Pantheism of Paganism, than the conviction, whether it be in full health or half-strangled, that by sin, man discovered in himself a self-determining

power—a power capable of originating acts and states, in itself not divine, and which is able to set up in this universe something which is not of God, which is not according to the mind of God, and which, if He is to hold the rule, He must transmute or destroy. It is the deepest witness of consciousness, this “I” which is not God. It is in sin that this individuality, this lonely and responsible “I” starts forth with such dread distinctness. Man knows what the “I” means, and then only fully, when he sees that he has become the parent of that which is hateful to God, the genesis of which he cannot charge on God, which exposes him righteously to the judgment of God, and which God lives to trouble and destroy.

This is the consciousness of sin in the human spirit; and this agonizing consciousness neither intellectual subtleties nor devilish falsehoods can charm out of the conscience of mankind. A man, a class, a race, may shake itself free from it for a time, but *man* never. “*Father, I have sinned,*” is the only confession which reaches the depths of the human consciousness; and the Gospel which demands the confession, and begins its ministry by deepening the conviction of sin, alone seems to him to be able to undertake the cure. As matter of history it is palpably true, that the convincing of sin, the inspiring a horror of sin—a horror which

took many grotesque and ghastly forms in the early Christian centuries—was the first work of that Gospel which was God's message to all mankind.

The history of conscience, then, I hold to be conclusive—the profound, universal, unalterable conviction of the moral consciousness in man, that his sin springs out of an “I” which is not God; that his sin is his own, his creature, for which he is as responsible as God is for the order of the world. “Conscience,” I think I hear some Rationalist sneering, “Conscience, yes! its fright has been real enough, and sad enough, in all ages; but what is conscience but a puppet whose wires are pulled by the priest. If the priest would be quiet, conscience would soon be at rest.”

Brethren, the priest is the creature of the conscience, not the conscience of the priest. It is the dread reality behind, which endows the priest with all his power; his yoke had been cast off and ground to fragments long ago, for none has pressed so heavily, but for the great mystery of sin, with which the priest has the art to play. It is the awful sense of the burden which the sinner takes on himself by sin, of the taint which has infected the self with a poison which no force that he is master of will expel, which lends to the men who proffer their aid in man's dire extremity such

tremendous influence, and lays the pagan world prostrate at their feet. No! the priest shall himself be summoned as witness, and his lips shall utter the chief testimony to the reality of the guilt of sin.

Sin then *is*, and is not God's creature. The Being capable of sinning *is* God's creature. For making him capable of sinning God is responsible, and there His responsibility, as concerns Adam's transgression, ends. For making me as I am, capable of sin, for bringing me into a sinful world in a body of sinful flesh, God is responsible; not for my sin, that grows up of myself in *me*. But for sending forth into such a world as this, generation after generation of living beings born to sin and to suffer, God is responsible. It is idle to say, by way of solving the difficulty on easy terms, that this is the work of Adam not of God; that from him all our sin and suffering flow. From Adam indisputably. "*By one man's disobedience sin entered into the world, and death by sin.*" But who makes the law of the inheritance? The fatal relation with Adam is established by the hand and sustained by the will of God. It is within the power of His hand to make men in their birth pure and upright as He made Adam in Eden; but He has chosen that we shall be born the children of the sinful Adam, and shall taste the fruit of his disobedience

from the first. He takes the responsibility, and we must look that fact fairly in the face, of sending us into a world in which, as our nature develops, and His law is revealed, the cry, "I am carnal, sold under sin," will inevitably fall from our lips. We are bound to believe that Adam in Eden, dressing and keeping the garden, would not have afforded room, in his nature, for the unfolding of the whole idea of God. The true Man is the second man, the Lord from heaven, and the Manhood which is transformed into His likeness; and that Divine figure of a man, the man of God's eternal kingdom, abides not in Eden, but beyond the wilderness life of transgression, and beyond the river of death. I say, that we are bound to believe this, for God could, at His will, have abolished the fallen Adam and his race, and produced new unfallen children in each successive age of the world. But He has chosen to prolong the race of sinners, because from the first the one great aim of His heart was redemption. To reign as King in a redeemed creation has been from the first His vision of heaven.

And here, too, the vision of Redemption opens in its profound relation to the whole system of the universe, and the whole plan of God, in the creation, constitution, and government of the world. It is the godlike act of God. God without a race

to redeem by sacrifice, and to rule redeemed, must have kept the glory of His Godhead veiled. Emmanuel, God with us, declares for the first time the glory of the Father; the express image of His substance was then, and then only, unveiled. God made man free, knowing that the unfolding of his freedom in such a body, in such a world, would lead him into dread experience of transgression; would lead him down to death, unless He interposed to save. Accepting the responsibility of the existence of a world of sinners (and the Deluge could as easily have finished its work), He accepted at once the responsibilities of Redemption. At once He stooped to lift the burden which else had crushed His helpless child. At once He set to light the pathways of the wilderness, on the brow of the first sentence, a bright gem of hope. At once He placed the Manger, the Garden, the Cross, the Grave, fully before His sight. That was the share which He took at once of the great burden, the great sorrow, the great shame, with which sin had oppressed the world. That Divine share in the shame and sorrow makes man's history the supreme history of the universe. This is the thread which, entwined with the dark woof of the history of man's freedom, makes the fabric more costly, more precious, than any which is woven "in the roaring

loom of time," more noble, more fruitful, more divine.

The sinless Adam could rest in Paradise till the serpent stung him into transgression. For the sinful Adam, through God's abounding love and the riches of His grace, there is rest in heaven, and in heaven alone. No restoration of Eden could satisfy the conditions of the grand problem which the Fall has stated. There are but two solutions possible. Either man must lie where his sin must sink him, in a deeper depth of shame and anguish than even a fiend can fathom, or man must rise through Redemption to a higher, diviner manhood, and eating of the tree of life in Christ, live before the face of God for ever. The first Adam is by grace abolished; the elder glory is done away by reason of the glory that excelleth. "*The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.*" Not from Eden, but from the pathways of the weary wilderness, all sinful and

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stained with tears, the Bride, the Lamb's wife, is taken to be arrayed in the pure white splendour of His righteousness ; and blessed, blessed beyond Adam in Eden, blessed beyond angels in heaven, are they who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb.





Sermon II.

The Burden of Existence.

“And unto Adam He said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, thou shalt not eat of it : cursed is the ground for thy sake ; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life ; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee ; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field ; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground ; for out of it wast thou taken : for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.”—GENESIS III. 17—19.

THE main object of the first discourse was to develop the thought expressed in the words, “*Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil.*” We may not shut our eyes to the fact that the Fall is spoken of as a step in man’s development, though, mystery as it may seem, if it rests there, a fatal one. A step out into freedom, but a freedom which, unless some

higher power interfere, is simply a freedom to die. There is no escape from death for the freeman who has sought to realize his freedom in separating his mind and will from God. The complete freeman is the child of two—of free humanity and the Divine Spirit. If God fails him freedom is death. In fact, it is but an illusory freedom that he wins. It is the passage into a fatal bondage. The freedom is but exercised in choosing his captivity. The desires of the flesh and of the mind become thenceforth his lords. From that moment, corrupting and destroying forces are at work upon the structure of his nature; it is a spurious freedom which he has grasped at; God only can make it real. “Carnal, sold under sin,” must thenceforth be written of him, and unless some new order of things arise out of the will of a Superior Being who has power to make that will effective, his act of freedom is the beginning of death.

This must be clearly borne in mind; the sentence “*In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die,*” is absolutely and inevitably true. The devil uttered a half truth: is it not characteristic of all his suggestions? He saw the development, but he did not see the death. But the development must be as clearly borne in mind. Man, by that act, widened quite infinitely the range of his experience, he expanded the orbit of his being, heaven and hell came equally within

its sphere. A knowledge of the things of God, such as no being inexperienced in the mystery of freedom could attain to, was within his range of power on the one hand ; an experience of evil, of woe and wretchedness, the mere dream of which could never have entered his quiet Paradise, was too dreadfully within his reach on the other. God recognizes the development : and God records the judgment—death.

So far, man by the Fall has taken a step out into a wider world, but the step is a deadly one. He has changed the quiet limits of his Eden for the free broad wilderness, but his one mission there is to find himself a grave. *“ And the Lord God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field ; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life : and I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed ; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel. Unto the woman He said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception ; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children ; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. And unto Adam He said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, thou shalt not eat of it : cursed is the ground for thy sake ;*

in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return."

Is this to be the end of the experiment: the act of freedom, judgment, death? It were a dark mystery were it left here. The creation of man, had this been the swift end of it, would have remained a stain on the wisdom and goodness of Him who is responsible for all that may come of creation, and at the door of whose government this abortion of freedom must have lain as a reproach for ever. We must look wider afield.

Man is manifestly made on a scale which no Paradise life can explain. Similarly, creation, through all its orders, is made on a scale which can only be explained by man. In every order of the creation there is a propulsive movement to the next higher order, and rudiments of organization exist in each, to which higher organisms are the key. The key *to* the whole, as well as *of* the whole, is man. And man in Eden was on a scale which his history in the wilderness alone explains and justifies. There are in him godlike powers of endurance, sacrifice, and ministry—wherein man shows likeliest God—which a life of sorrow and struggle

in the midst of a world which is struggling and sorrowing, alone could unfold and furnish with their theatre. We are, in truth, justified in saying that Adam, in Eden, was spiritually but an embryo, and these sorrows and struggles are the pains of his travail, through which, by grace, he is born into his full manhood in heaven. By grace, I say, but this is anticipating.

Looking at man then as he is, we may say that such a life as Paul lived was a higher, nobler, diviner life than any which was within the sinless Adam's reach. Looking at the world, too, we see everywhere traces that it was made to be the theatre of such a sorrowful and struggling life as man's. It was made before man, and for man; and, whether Mr. Darwin be right or wrong as to higher matters, "struggle for life" is its broad, grand characteristic. It sounds simple and calm enough in the sacred record. *"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day. And God said, Let*

there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament : and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day. And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear : and it was so. And God called the dry land Earth ; and the gathering together of the waters called He Seas : and God saw that it was good. And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth : and it was so. And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind : and God saw that it was good. And the evening and the morning were the third day." But lift the veil. Everywhere beneath is life unfolding, through struggle, suffering, and death. Every blade of grass, every lump of stone, has been fed by death, and feeds life, to die. This was all ordered before man, and for man, and was set from the first to the key-note of his life. And it all says plainly that the Fall was no accident which has deranged the orderly plan of creation,

calling for some new device to repair the fracture and restore the waste ; but rather a step, the whole character and issues of which were contemplated from the beginning of creation, and which becomes the condition of the full unfolding of the Name—the glory of God.

Did God, then, make man to sin? Is it all His work, the sin and the salvation? No, we again repeat, a thousand times, no! A sin that God made would be no sin. Connect it with God, and the word is meaningless. A sin is the birth into the universe of something which is not after the will of God. Sin in man is the rising up within him of that which, be it what it may or whence it may, he knows is not God; for which he cannot make God responsible, and the burden of which—and here is the anguish and horror of it—he cannot shift off from himself. This horror and anguish are man's witnesses in all ages that sin is a stern reality which no philosophy can explain away. The priest does not make the burden, it is the burden which, among the ignorant and wretched, makes the priest. Sin *is*, and "*by one man sin entered into the world:*" it is not God's work. "*And sin reigneth unto death.*" Death is its inevitable consummation and doom.

Here, then, we have a being who has stepped out into a development which was forecast before

his creation, who was made upon a scale which that development, with all its bitter fruits, alone explains, and who was placed in a world manifestly set to the same key-note and fitted to be the theatre of that development, and yet the liberty which he has won is simply the liberty to die. He has risen to a dread height of capacity and experience ; he has sunk to a fearful depth in actual condition and destiny. What shall we say, then? Is it that God made a being whose first step—which, though God did not tell him to take it, nay, warned him against taking it, God knew that he would take—was his ruin ; a race, a world, broken from their very birth? Or is it that the Fall, if viewed by itself, and apart from Redemption, would be an unmeaning, and incomprehensible abortion of a Divine idea ; and that the God who made man, in the very act of making him, took upon Himself the burden and responsibility of a Redeemer—and thus made him, not that he might sin, but that sinning he might be saved.

Here the vision of Redemption opens. The first judgment on man was the first lifting of the curtain on the drama:—“*And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed ; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.*” Read at once, it was all contained in those primeval words, the Messianic chapter in Isaiah:—“*He is despised and rejected of men ; a man of*

sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from Him; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not. Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth. He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare His generation? for He was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was He stricken.”—(Isa. liii. 3—8.) Isaiah was written in the Divine counsel before Adam was fashioned; and when the Lord made such a race and such a world, and foresaw sin and all its fruits, this was the burden which He took upon His own heart.

For sin, then, the act of transgression, God is not to any extent, in any way responsible, save for the creation of a being who was capable of it. But when we pass on to consider the history of the race, a new and more difficult problem confronts us; we find the

Creator assuming a new responsibility with regard to sin, the nature of which we must now explore.

Is each new birth of a living child into our world a new and independent experiment of freedom, under the same conditions as that of Adam, and happening invariably to issue in the same results? This Pelagian view is very widely entertained, especially by those who bear the reputation of advanced thinkers; but I confess that it appears to me to account very feebly for the moral phenomena of the world. The child of a vicious sire does not come into the world as Adam came forth from the hand of God. And the child of a long line of vicious sires? Is there a moral crippling, which has its visible analogue in the shaky scrofulous limbs which such an ancestry hands down? It is a dark, deep subject, but it is one which cannot always be put aside among the closeted skeletons of the church. The infant of a thief's, drunkard's, or gambler's home finds anything but an Eden around him in his undeveloped days. Adam's sin has changed the conditions under which his children are born and grow. Human nature, whereof we all are partakers, has a distinct unity of its own. When we speak of humanity, we do not describe simply an aggregation of isolated, independent individuals, who happen to repeat, each for himself, the same experiment, and to arrive at the same result. There is a certain tincture which

runs through the whole of it, and Adam made that tincture what it is. "*By one man sin entered into the world,*" and "*by that one man's disobedience many were made sinners.*" God has so related us to Adam that our nature, wherein we were born, is what his sin has made it; and out of that nature, with the first dawnings of consciousness, transgressions come. This condition of human nature, out of which, as consciousness developes, transgressions grow, and which we owe to the sin of our head, theologians may call original sin. It is, in many respects, an unfortunate term; but we need some term to express the truth, that each man is not an independent and isolated Adam, but a child of the fallen Adam, inheriting something from Adam the sinner, which Adam in Paradise had never transmitted to his sons. But when theologians pass on to treat the term "original sin" as equivalent to "original guilt," as though with the nature guilt had descended; when they maintain, as is maintained substantially in all confessions which follow the Augustinian view, that "therefore, in every person born into this world, it deserveth God's wrath and damnation," they announce a dogma which in its naked simplicity is simply horrible; they confound all intelligent notions of what sin and guilt must mean in any but theological language; and they attribute to God, whose will it is that under this law of

inheritance children should be born into this world, a malignant delight in punishment, which would, were it widely current, make belief impossible to all whose special theological culture had not specially qualified them to believe a lie.

And it is mere idleness, as we have seen, to attempt to evade the difficulty on the ground that the sin is Adam's work, and that God simply recognizes and deals with it as a fact, of which He is not the author, but of which He is bound to take account. The sin is Adam's work, but who established that headship, in virtue of which Adam's nature and the fruit of his transgression descends to his sons? The law of inheritance is God's work, not Adam's. A man is responsible for his own transgressions, but what he shall transmit is beyond the sphere of his own volition. That goes according to laws in the establishment and maintenance of which he is utterly powerless, which have been enacted and are swayed by God. If each child born into our world brings into that world a nature which has become what it is by the sin of Adam, it is because God wills that under these conditions each human child shall be born and grow. Man is powerless here; God is all-powerful to do according to His own will. The power which made Adam could make ten thousand Adams, and renew in each generation the first, the typical experiment of free-

will. But God, the infinite in wisdom and in goodness, has chosen otherwise ; and He makes Himself responsible for the perpetuation of a sinful race in a suffering world. Paul's argument, in Romans v. 12—14, is decisive as to the relation existing by nature between the human members and Adam, the head. Death reigns over all ; the infant, the veteran, the Jew, the Christian, the Pagan, are alike and equally the subjects of his sway, for they alike partake of the nature which Adam corrupted by his transgression, and they partake of the fruit of the transgression, which then attached itself to the race. But guilt is another matter ; it can attach to the individual alone, in the deliberate exercise of his developed will ; through a deliberate, wilful choosing of the evil, when the good was plainly within his sight and choice. For what man is, as he comes into the world and grows, half conscious, to the full possession and exercise of his freedom, the Father of Spirits makes Himself responsible. It is not that God made a sinful nature, and ordained that man should inherit it ; but man having made a nature sinful, God ordains that it shall perpetuate itself after its likeness in each generation, and takes upon Himself the burden of this natural corruption and misery of the world.

And the burden must needs be a very awful burden ; a burden which must press heavily on the heart

of God ; a burden which nothing but a great love and a great hope could bear. There was a moment when the pressure of the burden was overwhelming ; when what God saw on the earth was too terrible for Him to suffer it to endure :—“ *And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the Lord that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him at His heart. And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth ; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air ; for it repenteth me that I have made them. . . . The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt ; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth. And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me ; for the earth is filled with violence through them ; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth. . . . In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, the same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened. And the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights. . . . And all flesh died that moved upon the earth, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of beast, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth, and every man :*

all in whose nostrils was the breath of life, of all that was in the dry land, died. And every living substance was destroyed which was upon the face of the ground, both man, and cattle, and the creeping things, and the fowl of the heaven; and they were destroyed from the earth: and Noah only remained alive, and they that were with him in the ark."
(Gen. vi., vii.)

This is a very terrible record; most terrible, if we try to imagine the cost of this patience, which at length was wearied, to the Being who had made Himself responsible for the possible existence of all this; not for its creation, but for its continued existence, with all the reproach which it seemed to cast on Heaven, and all the agony with which it tormented the world. The earth was corrupt and *full* of violence. The time had been when He had looked on all that He had made, and "behold it was very good;" and now it repented Him that He had made it. The agony of life had become too intolerable for Heaven to look upon, the desolation of earth too drear. This leads me to the main subject of this discourse.

The burden of existence, under the conditions which, created by the sin of Adam, have been perpetuated by the will of God. It was a simple matter, the creation of an Eden; a peaceful, joyous life smiled childlike in the face of Heaven, which

dropped responsive benedictions. Full of deep and solemn gladness, we can well believe, were those immortal spirits who watched the pathways of the young world, and wondered and gladdened at the beauty of the infant creation, with its ἀνήριθμον γέλασμα, and the glorious godlike form whose hand grasped its sceptre, and ruled all its myriad dependent orders as king. When Creation emerged, rosy as a bride, and all begemmed with splendours, out of the dark womb of chaos, well might the morning stars sing together, and all the sons of God shout aloud for joy.

Alas, that so fair and bright a promise should be blighted so soon! We read on but a few pages in the only record that remains to us of that primeval time, and the earth is "full of deceit and violence," of woe and wailing, of bitter misery and shameful wrong, and God repented Him of His work. Already it had cost too dear—the cost that heaven chiefly recks of, the tears, and groans, and moans of men. It is a dread world for a loving and righteous God to create and sustain. We catch but a few faint notes of the great monotone of pain and despair, which goes up ever into the ear of Heaven from a world which God made to be so blest. Do you ever set yourself fairly to realize what lies bare to the eye of Heaven in the daily life and travail of the world? We talk of houses with their fronts off, and what they would reveal to us. Think of the

world with its veil off, and the burning eye upon it; all, of which you catch faint and passing glimpses and shudder, bare in its naked horror before the eye of God. Things noble, beautiful, and glorious, blessed be God, mingle with them, and catch and flash back like gems through the darkness the light which streams over it all from on high. But there was a time when the earth was *full* of deceit and violence, and when one man only found favour with the Lord. Picture it, when this was the testimony of the loving and hoping Being who made it all, and who made it to be blest. Picture it now: take a day's walk with a city missionary in any poor district of London, and survey, if you can without shuddering, the filth, the squalor, the famine, the nakedness, the sickness, the cursing, the blasphemy, the brutality, that abound. There are little helpless infants by myriads, shrieking in their bitter agony of pain or hunger, to be silenced by curses and blows awhile, till the screams break out afresh. The tender mother's heart, on which the great Father cast the young nurslings—most helpless of all the infants of creation—as hard and cold as the bare stones on which they lie, moaning and sobbing into life. There are myriads of poor women, sick, weary, so full of pain and heartache, that a plunge into the midnight river would be a balmy rest, but for the

little ones for whom the mother drags herself, with stern courage, which is always on the edge of breaking strain, through the daily sixteen hours of monotonous toil ; and the wage just keeps them in bread, but will not drive the wolfish look of famine out of their gaunt faces—sight of agony to a mother's heart, the mute cry of famine in childish eyes ; and what to the great Father who sent them hither, and keeps them here, and on whom the responsibility of suffering the existence of such misery wholly rests ! I need not multiply specimens of the life of great cities in their Rookeries and Rag-fairs. Set before your mind's eye all that you have seen of sin, sickness, and misery ; and multiply it by myriads, by millions. See every great city of the world full of this, or worse. For this is Christian England ; God only knows—men tremble to say what they have seen of the horrors of the life of the poor in the great cities of the East. Picture, too, the brutal degradation, the sullen misery of the great masses of the tillers of the ground through the whole empire of Paganism ; the tortures, physical and moral, of the millions of embruted slaves, who through the world are held to toil by the whips of their hardly less brutal lords. The myriads of living men—each of them bound as tenderly as you are to a circle which holds them dear, and which will be filled with anguish by their loss—whom emperors, kings,

and presidents can, by touching a bell or signing a name, hurl against each other in furious shock ; leaving them inevitably dashed to fragments, strewn, like the dead leaves of autumn, on the bloody ground, while wide neighbourhoods of men wail, as once Rachael wailed for her children, and refuse to be comforted because they are not. Measure it all, as far as your little line will reach—the sins of power, the woes of its victims,

“ The oppressor’s wrong, the proud man’s contumely,
The pangs of despised love, the law’s delay,
The insolence of office, and the spurns
That patient merit of the unworthy takes”—

and remember that all which you can imagine of human misery and wrong, is but as a pool on the sea-shore to the great ocean ; that that great ocean is bare to the eye of God, and that ever the question is before Him—Shall I bear it yet, or destroy ? Measure this, and you will understand something of the burden of existence, as it is felt by Him who knows all that flows out of existence, who sees all the raging madness, and hears all the moaning misery of the world. And He endures it ; He endures it even with the memory of Eden, for the sake of the great hope which He cherishes of the glory which grace may bring out of it in His eternal heaven. He spake not of things which He but looked down upon

from the supreme height of His serene blessedness when He said, "Behold, we count them blessed which endure." Measuring the burden of existence under the conditions which sin has developed, we see that the supreme endurance in the universe is—the endurance of God !

A very terrible endowment, too, is life for man. To those who are content to dart about in the shallows, gay in the sunlight, and catch the flies which the stream bears down, life may be merry enough ; and they will turn a very impatient ear to those who speak of it as an awful endowment, and who realize that the pressure of its burden may be greater than a man can bear ; but the gay thoery finds but little support from Scripture, and as little from the broad history of mankind. The first human home may perhaps be taken as striking the key-note of history. And what is the picture which it presents to us ? Beauty, innocence, gentleness, faith, dead on the cold ground, blood-flecked and ghastly ; while power, manly vigour, imperious will, stagger forth from the childless home in a horror of remorse and misery, moaning already in the ear of outraged Heaven, "My punishment is greater than I can bear." To men who live, who are not content simply to play at living, there are moments when life appears not only a wonderful, but a terrible thing ; a gift too awful to be forced

on any man without the consent of his free will. But He who gives it asks no consent of us, and leaves no choice. He calls us forth into life under conditions which sin and death have made for us, and which He elects to perpetuate, and He compels us to live on and to bear the burden, *to* death, *through* death, and *to* eternity. The burden, be it light or heavy ; and how much of the weight depends on temperament and early nurture, with which our will has absolutely nothing to do ! There is a child of sickly or vicious parents, born with a rotten constitution, which will make life one long, weary strain, and nursed to a temper which will break out through life in a ceaseless battle against society. Perhaps trained to be a thief, taught to hate, as a child, the laws and the order which are the securities of freedom to the virtuous and genial on whose birth and growth Heaven has rained benedictions, but which become iron prison-bars to the young outlaw, which will eventually cage him, nay, crush him at last ! And that man must bear his burden as surely as the most light-hearted of us ; he may have God's help to bear it, but he shall not lay it down. Misery drives myriads of the weary and heavy-laden to take arms against this sea of troubles, and, by one daring effort break from them into the quiet sleep of death, in its quiet home—the grave ! Yes—

"But in that sleep of death what dreams may come,
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil!"

The vision of the betrayed and murdered Saviour so haunted the brain of the betrayer, that it drove him to madness. "*Judas went and hanged himself.*" The victim of the cross was the last image which faded from before his starting eyeball, as it glared in its last agony here. "The Lamb as it had been slain," was the first form that affronted him, as his eye opened there on the visions of eternity. "*It had been better for that man that he had never been born.*"

But it is not from the world's chief criminals or traitors that we draw our illustrations of the burden of existence. There are true and faithful men and women by myriads, who have felt the heart ache so keenly, as those dearer than their own being have passed through the veil and vanished from their touch and sight, that every dear bond has become a pain because of its inevitable rupture; they have to school themselves to accept thankfully the dearest gifts of Heaven, because of the sorrow which they will bring with the joy to overstrained and lacerated hearts. And, sounding the deeper mysteries of existence, he was one of the world's best and greatest, who once cried in intolerable anguish, "*O miserable man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*" There was

once, too, a grand old Eastern patriarch and father of his tribe, who could paint this picture of his life:—
“*When the ear heard me, then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me: because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me: and I caused the widow’s heart to sing for joy. I put on righteousness, and it clothed me: my judgment was as a robe and a diadem. I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame. I was a father to the poor: and the cause which I knew not I searched out.*” (Job xxix. 11—16.) That man, by no sin of his own, came to utter the most awful anathema on his own existence, which survives in any literature. “*And Job spake, and said, Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, There is a man child conceived. Let that day be darkness; let not God regard it from above, neither let the light shine upon it. Let darkness and the shadow of death stain it; let a cloud dwell upon it; let the blackness of the day terrify it. As for that night, let darkness seize upon it; let it not be joined unto the days of the year, let it not come into the number of the months. Lo, let that night be solitary, let no joyful voice come therein. Why died I not from the womb? Why did I not give up the ghost when I came out of the belly? Why did the knees prevent me, or why the breasts*

that I should suck? For now should I have lain still and been quiet, I should have slept: then had I been at rest." (Job iii. 2—7; 11—13.) The noblest men, aiming at their noblest, are perhaps most conscious of the pressure. The confessions of David, of St. Augustine, of Alfred the Great, are full of a cry which not seldom deepened into the moan, "The burden is greater than I can bear." These are the men who mourn most bitterly over the sin which taints the holiest purpose, the infirmity which cripples the manliest effort, the weariness which palsies the combatant even when battling for the noblest prize. They see the shadow of self haunting even the most sublime self-sacrifice; doubts of the reality of things unseen sickly o'er the most heroic faith. Passion, self-will, ambition, worldliness, and lust, are still insurgent, and against them they have to stand ever full armed on guard. Life becomes to the noblest a ceaseless, weary war against self, a self from which they never can, in their own strength, get free. The noblest, too, are the loneliest here. The world ill fits them, and they ill fit the world. Life becomes a great longing; and if the future but prolongs the present, if they can but see before them an eternity under the same conditions, the burden does become greater than they can bear. Paganism adds its witness. Not its worst children, but its best and wisest, are

pressed most hardly by the burden of life. I quote two passages which appear to me to utter with singular simplicity and intensity the cry of the Pagan heart under the pressure. The one is from the hot East, the other from the cold, hardy North. The atmosphere of homely but bleak Northumbria breathes in the one, the glow of tropical India in the other.

"Led by illusion on a difficult road, the caravan of souls wanders in the forest of existence, thirsting for happiness, but unable to find it. Five brigands (the senses) pillage it. Assailed in a forest, entangled with bind-weed, grass, and bushes, the traveller flies, carried on by his desires; tormented by the cries of innumerable crickets, which torture his ears, and the voice of the screech-owl that agitates his heart, he stops exhausted by hunger near poisonous trees, or rushes toward water which proves a mirage. Now wishing to ascend a mountain, he slips through thorns and stones, and stops at last worn out. Here he is seized by reptiles. Now seeking honey, is stung by bees that produce it. Disputing with his companions, losing the goods they take from him, he falls down on the road overwhelmed with grief. Leaving behind those who fall, the caravan marches on, dragging in its course all those who are born. Not one ever goes back on his steps. Now the traveller clings to the branches of the bind-weed, attracted by the songs of the birds hidden within. He carries his chain without hope of breaking it. No one knows the term of his voyage."—*Bhagavata Purana*, translated by Bournouf, quoted by E. de Pressensé.

Another of the king's (Edwin of Northumbria, A.D. 627) chief men, approving of the words and exhortation of Paulinus (the Christian missionary), said,—“The present life of man, O king, seems to me, in comparison of that time which is unknown to us, like to the swift flight of a sparrow through the room wherein you sit at supper, in winter, with your commanders and ministers, and a good fire in the midst, whilst the storms of hail and snow prevail abroad; the sparrow, I say, flying in at one door, and immediately out at another, whilst he is within, is safe from the wintry storm; but after a short space of fair weather, he immediately vanishes out of your sight into the dark winter from which he had emerged. So this life of man appears for a short space, but of what went before, or what is to follow, we are utterly ignorant. If therefore, this new doctrine contains something more certain, it seems justly to deserve to be followed.”—*Bede, Hist. Eccl.*, b. ii., c. 13.

They were wise, brave, and good men, according to the measure of Pagan goodness, who wrote these words. But they felt a horror of great darkness upon them when they looked into this mystery of existence; they saw no light; death were welcome as a bride, if death could end it all. Annihilation is the prayer of the Hindu heart. Brethren, it is not the brutality and violence, but the intellect and spirit of the world, which have fainted under the burden. The end of all man's speculations about the nature of existence and the mystery of its burden, has been reached in the cry which was wrung from one of the great ones of old, a model of uprightness, perfectness, and endurance, "The burden is too heavy; loose me, and let me go into the world where consciousness is lost for ever, where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest."





Sermon III.

The Pressure of the Burden on God.

“Surely He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.”

ISAIAH LIII. 4.

“**G**OD” according to definitions, and “God” according to revelation, present some startling contrasts. The God of science and the God of faith manifest aspects which it is difficult to arrange in harmony. It is, in a measure, inevitable that it should be so, at least until the finite mind can comprehend the mystery of God. The Bible speaks to us of a God who lives, loves, hopes, grieves, sympathises, angers, and repents. The Book of Nature, read out by science, presents to us a great First Cause, whose one calm self-manifestation is the order of the world. The study of the law, and through the

law the mind of Him who ordained it, tends ever to enlarge and lift up our thoughts of the Being whom, meeting Him in revelation, we are tempted too readily to conceive of as after our own likeness. Is it too much for the pure devotees of science to believe, that the knowledge of the living Being whom revelation declares to us, is of infinite worth to them, enabling them to struggle successfully against a natural tendency to lose the Life in the Law, the Being in the Sum of all the manifestations of force whose complete harmony is the universe, the order of which universe the revelation of the living God in His man-ward relations, as unveiled in the Scripture, seems to the scientific eye, at first sight, to disturb, if not to destroy.

It is the very heart of those man-ward relations to which I call your earnest attention now.

My positions are these :—

I. The Lord—electing to perpetuate the sinful race, to endure all the sorrow which Heaven would look upon, and the question which would fall upon His government through the existence of a world so full of wrong and wretchedness, in a universe whose order was His charge—stooped at once, in infinite, tender pity, to lift the burden, and to become a fellow-wayfarer in the sorrowful pilgrimage to which man had doomed himself by his sin.

This may seem strong language ; but if redemption means anything, it means this—God sharing from the first the burden of humanity, and taking on Himself the full pressure of the load which He still left to press upon the world. Remember that one word had ended the whole experiment. God had created man upright, free as an angel to serve Him. He had created him for Himself, to rule as His regent in this inferior world. And man elected not to be His regent. He elected to rule himself, and to defy God. He elected a life of discord with God and the creation ; he elected to be an instrument of confusion where God made him to be a keystone of order, and most righteously the blow might have fallen, and the wrecks of the abortive experiment might have been crushed out into the everlasting night. None could have questioned the righteousness of the doom. The history would, in that case, simply have been that of an abortion, buried quickly out of sight, vanished from before the eye of the universe for ever.

But this was not the election of Heaven. God drove Adam forth into the wilderness, and ordained that he should beget sons in his own image, to be the heirs of his sinful nature, and to press on to its final issues of misery the experiment of freedom which he had begun. The sin being there, God elected not to destroy the sinner, but to spare him

to be the parent of children who should work out the problem to the fatal issue, and drink the cup of bitterness which Adam's transgression had mingled for man to the very dregs. That was God's decree. And now imagine that the decree had ended there—that no thought of redemption had entered into the mind of God. How if His decree had been that men were to be born, generation after generation, to sin and to suffer in an ever-widening circle of corruption and misery ; the race rotting morally while multiplying physically, born, nursed, and buried, in an atmosphere of foul and fetid decay. Born, too, to sin and suffer thus by no election of their own, dependent on another's will for their very existence—an existence which must inevitably become a curse to them—a curse which they would never be able to shake off, which would blacken and deepen through eternity. Picture this, it is a vision of horror. Terrible as the actual life of the world has been and is, even with the promise to light the present and irradiate the future, the vision of a world like this, doomed to live on without one gleam of hope, to rot without one pulse of regenerating life, would be purely horrible. This earth would then become the horror of horrors of the universe, and the God who could perpetuate a race to suffer these miseries would be a demon rather than a God. And to man ignorant

of redemption, the author of this terrible world-system seems to be a demon. Devil-worship is the most powerful of the Pagan worships of the world.

Quite other and higher, and more godlike than man's highest idea of God, are His thoughts to us-ward. Dooming man to the sorrowful life of the wilderness, sparing him to sin and to suffer, and to be the parent of others who should sin and suffer, He stooped at once and lifted the burden which else had been crushing; and He made man understand, as He drove him forth from Eden, that He would meet him in the wilderness, would share its burdens, cares, and sorrows, and become his fellow in all but the sin of the life to which he had been driven forth by his Lord. "*And unto Adam He said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.*" (Gen. iii. 17—19.)

I am persuaded that we make too little of the measure in which God entered into the life of man from the very hour of the transgression, as ex-

pressed in the text which I have just quoted. It seems a simple matter, "The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head, but the serpent shall bruise his heel;" but it carries in its womb the whole history of redemption. Not a tear, not a groan, not a weary hour, not a toilsome journey, not a thankless gift of the Son of Man was forgotten when that promise was made to the race. The mother bending over the babe in the manger of the inn at Bethlehem, and meeting already in those young eyes a glance of prophetic sorrow, which as a sword pierced her heart; the tear-stained, blood-wet footsteps of the Man of Sorrows along the world's sad pathways; the swimming agony of the moment when the over-strung chords had reached their breaking strain, and the touch of an angel's hand enabled them to endure; the trembling, tottering steps which could hardly bear the self-devoted victim to the scene of His last agony; the horror of great darkness which fell on His soul, when God incarnate fainted, died, under the weight of the burden which He had lifted from the world; all these were before the eye of Him who, when He ordained that the sinful race should multiply sin and suffering if they would, until the world was filled with it, announced Himself as its Redeemer, and took the crushing burden on His own heart. In that hour, when man was bend-

ing in shame and anguish before Him, and tasting the bitter cup of which the coming generations should drink the dregs, He lifted it to His own lips. In that hour the Redeemer of man took it from the Father's hand: Bethlehem, Gethsemane, and Calvary, were already there in Eden to the Saviour's heart. Then said He, "*Lo, I come; in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart.*" Then the word was spoken, "*The cup which my Father giveth me to drink, shall I not drink of it:*" and then the strength was won which expressed itself in the prayer, "*Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour. Nay, but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name.*" Whatever that hour of transgression had cost to Adam, it had cost more to the Lord. However heavily that life of sin and suffering pressed on Adam, there was One on whom it pressed more heavily, and who needed all His divine strength to endure. When murder broke up the first human home, and Eve and Adam hung in speechless sorrow over the first revelation of what was meant by death, there was One who watched it from on high; whose home, too, had been rifled, whose earth already was red with the guilty blood-stains which would one day incarnadine its fairest plains. At

once, as the responsible Lord and Keeper of men, He came forth to judge the murderer, and to take at once a sorrowful part in pressing forward the development of the human race. The day came when He could endure the spectacle no longer. I have already spoken to you of the Deluge, and prayed you to imagine what burden that Fatherly heart had borne before the day of long-suffering patience was exhausted, and even He saw no remedy but the stroke of doom. The record is calm, collected, and stern as the word of a judge pronouncing sentence of death. But we too little think of the sorrow, the anguish, through which this stern necessity revealed itself. "It is a ruler judging his rebels;" we say, "a swift, sharp stroke, and it is over, and his kingdom is the better and quieter for their death." Yes! this is a part of the truth. But that Ruler was One who, even then, was capable of the sacrifice, yea, had offered it in His heart, which, when it was revealed at length, appeared the very fervour of tenderness, the very prodigality of love. "*God commendeth His love toward us, in that while we were yet rebels Christ died for us.*" "*Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*" "*Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us.*" The love was there in

that Ruler's heart already. Consider how fully He shared with Noah the burden, nay, bore it as Noah could never bear it, as He watched daily the godless conversation of the wicked, and saw the hour approaching when even His love could find no longer a reason to spare.

And this, brethren, is the key to history. God was grieved with Egypt, He was grieved with Canaan, above all He was grieved with Israel; but it was the old grief with which Adam had filled His heart. Take this touching picture as the key to God's dealings:—" *I will mention the loving-kindnesses of the Lord, and the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord hath bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which He hath bestowed on them according to His mercies, and according to the multitude of His loving-kindnesses. For He said, Surely they are my people, children that will not lie: so He was their Saviour. In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved them: in His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bare them, and carried them all the days of old. But they rebelled, and vexed His Holy Spirit: therefore He was turned to be their enemy, and He fought against them. Then He remembered the days of old, Moses, and his people, saying, Where is He that brought them up out of the sea with the shepherd of His flock? where*

is He that put His Holy Spirit within Him? That led them by the right hand of Moses with His glorious arm, dividing the water before them, to make Himself an everlasting name? That led them through the deep, as an horse in the wilderness, that they should not stumble? As a beast goeth down into the valley, the Spirit of the Lord caused him to rest : so didst thou lead thy people, to make thyself a glorious name." (Isaiah lxiii. 7—14.) Even then, closer than a mother's relation to a nursling, was God's relation to mankind. Nothing of all the sin, the wrong, the wretchedness, which filled earth with wailing, failed to reach and grieve His heart. For His love is so true and tender, though He be the High and Lofty One inhabiting eternity, that the tiniest human nursling is dear to Him as no star is dear. "*He feeds His flock like a shepherd; He gathers the lambs with His arm, and folds them in His bosom, and gently leads those that are with young.*" Realize what to Him has been through the ages the burden of all this wrong and anguish with which Adam's transgression has filled His world. I again say that the laws by which man exists are His work. Every human infant born into the world comes into it ultimately from His hand. Each moment renews the first election, to let man live on, and see for himself that sin is deadly; to let him try the path which he had chosen, and press

it to the bitter end. And the election is a burden, not to man only, but also to Heaven and to God.

Suffering sin to live on and reproduce itself, with all its bitter fruits, in the universe which He made to be so blest, He needs must become its sacrifice ; making the atonement for the sin which He did not on the moment crush, and bearing the burden of the sorrow which He did not at once destroy. And this is Divine love. It must share the sorrow which it allows to live on, though the fountain of the sorrow be a sin which it hates ; it must lift and bear the burden which most righteous necessities lay heavily upon erring souls. We none of us know, even dimly, what is meant by "Emmanuel," "God with us." God always with us, incarnate from the hour when He announced Himself as the woman's seed, and the destroyer of her foe. God with us, our fellow in all the dread experience into which our sharing in the sin of Adam has driven us ; knowing Himself the full pressure of its burdens, and infinitely more nearly touched than we are by everything that concerns the dark, sad history of mankind.

II. The fellowship of God with the race in the very hour of the transgression, infused at once a tincture of hope into the experience of the sinner, and made it, from the first, a discipline unto life instead of a judgment unto death. .

We talk often rashly enough of the first curse.

The curse is on the serpent, on the ground—everywhere but on man. There is no curse to the man who suffers in hope. The aim of God, in the hour of the first misery of the parents of our race, was to embreathe a hope into their wounded and stricken hearts. The forbidden fruit, like a serpent's bite, had struck its poison into the springs of their blood. Their eyes were opened, a new world was unveiled, but all was strange, and chill, and drear. They had won a new kingdom, but they were stricken with a death-like languor through all their blood. It was as though they had touched its sceptre but to die. They cowered in the coverts of the garden wounded, smitten ; they shrank from God, from light, from all that had made the brightness of their home. Death had already set his cold seal upon their brow ; they knew good and evil, but they knew, in the same instant, as the poison stole through their veins, that they were beginning to die. A great horror of dismay and anguish would seize them as they looked forth on this new and unknown world of which they had forced the entrance—the untrodden wilderness of freedom, on the edge of which, by one daring act, they had set their steps. We can understand how the darkness settled on the soul of Adam, when he realized at length that he had become his own master in his own world ; a world whose moral features,

within limits, he might mould and finish according to his own will. "*Ye shall be as gods.*" They felt, as they gazed forth from the gate of their happy Eden, over the wide, wild, unhomelike world, which was all their own, how awful was the height which they had scaled, how terrible was the endowment they had won. As the night fell shuddering over their first wilderness shelter, these "would-be gods" would moan like children lost in the darkness, and pray to be taken home again into their peaceful Paradise, and rest once more under the shield of the visible hosts of the Lord. But the night brought back no responses. The morning showed them no backward path. Eden was lost to them, and lost to them for ever. They were out there alone, alone, with the death-shiver already in their blood, and around them a wilderness world. And then the promise rose like a moon on their darkness; a soft light of heavenly pity and love shone down on their night of sorrow. It prophesied a dawn when the great Sun, the Sun of their Eden, should again rise and shine upon their world.

The promise changed at once and absolutely the character of their wilderness discipline. Man has been the child of hope, of a Divine hope, from the very hour of his transgression. The first word which the Lord uttered to the sinner announced

the commencement of a moral struggle and effort, the burden of which would rest on God. It would end in the destruction of that death which had already stricken man as its victim ; and in the opening of a new home beyond the wide, drear wilderness, in which Eden itself would be forgotten, its quiet happiness eclipsed for ever by the transporting joys of heaven. As Adam took that hope into his heart, and measured the meaning of the Divine promise, he realized that God had literally cast in His lot with man, and was with him in the wilderness—not watching but tending his development, not pitying but sharing his sorrow, not surveying but fighting his battles, making man's enemy His enemy, man's hope His hope, man's deliverance, salvation, and glory His end. Then a light holier than the sunlight of Eden would steal over the waste ; and, ere the last gleam of the glory which had gilded the bowers of Eden had faded, the far distance would begin to glow with an intenser lustre, and reveal, as Canaan was revealed from Pisgah's crest, the broad sunlit world which was to be the home of souls made perfect by suffering—the rest which remaineth when all the struggle and anguish which God had stooped to share should be ended, and the fruits of the Divine discipline should be for ever won.

And this hope, which rises not out of the promise only, but out of the oldest fact in man's

history, the Incarnation, is, as I have said, the thread of light entwined with the woof of man's experience—the royal thread of the fabric of God. This hope, born of God, and kept alive by Him in the darkness of the world's night, is the one thing on earth and in man which has made his life and his history any other than a long death-agony, tended by the devil with the gospel of despair. It had been that, but that God has lit and kept alive in the great heart of humanity a hope which the devil has never been able to kill, whose root is Emmanuel, God with us. The measure in which any age or any soul has got its eye on the light which then was kindled, the hope which then was set before man, is the measure in which it has been able to hold out against the devil, and in the strength of God to spoil him of his prey. What this measure may have been in the dark night of ante-Christian or Pagan ages, is a deep mystery. We know not. It is a dreary and, to the eye of sense, a hopeless history—the development of man, even under the inspiration of this fellowship of God. But the Apostle's language in the third chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, as well as the whole scope of Scripture, justifies us in believing that the Redemption which is by Christ Jesus, covers the whole dealings of God with man, from the first hour of his history to the last consummation. And

God sees the hope, the turning to the light though feebly and from afar, when it escapes our sight. Elijah thought that there was but one faithful one left in his day ; God had seven thousand who had never bowed the knee to Baal, even in the darkest hour of Israel's history: and He has His eye on these prisoners of hope where we never dream of searching for them, in every country and in every age of the world.

III. This first promise to man, this fellowship of God with the sinning, suffering race, whose existence He perpetuated, pledged Him to the sacrifice of Calvary, the baptism of Pentecost, and the abiding of the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, with the world. "Emmanuel" meant—God on Calvary. There alone could the whole hope of man be realized, the whole promise of God be fulfilled. The God who stooped to share the burden, must at length bear it wholly and bear it away. Having endured sin in the world, and before His face, having taken charge of the future of a sinful race, He must make the full atonement for them. He must become their sacrifice ; and the sentence of death which eternal necessities' imposed, He must, if He would spare them, execute on Himself. Sin being made exceeding sinful by His revelation of the law, He must endure the sentence of that law, that its sinfulness in His sight

might appear to all, and be stamped into the history of the universe for ever. The race which He had taken into the fellowship of His compassionate love, being dead in sins, He must, not teach, not guide, not help only, but quicken, if He would save; unless He could give a new mind, a new heart, a new life, to the world, He had lifted the burden of its sin and misery in vain. The whole economy of grace, as we call it, the atoning sacrifice, the quickening Spirit, the reigning Mediator on the throne, comes forth in virtue of that one promise which changed the misery of man the sinner into a discipline instead of a doom. From that gate of Eden whence Adam gazed shuddering over the wilderness, Calvary was already in sight; yea, and beyond Calvary—as the dawn broke red and clear behind the agony of Gethsemane—on the dim outer edge of the wilderness which bore the cross on its rude breast, a golden radiance might be seen. It is the dawning of that eternal day of Restitution, when Adam, lost in Eden, restored in Christ, shall lead the line of his ransomed sons, clothed in triumphal robes, and crowned, to present them before Him of whom he was the figure, and in whom the likeness which he lost is restored—transfigured, and glorified, the supreme celestial form through eternity. And, methinks, even in that hour of transgression, the fallen man might have

caught the prelude of that exulting strain, which shall break like a flood of glorious harmony, as the voice of waters, and the voice of thunders, around the throne of the second Adam, the Lord from heaven, when the triumph of Calvary is complete, "*Worthy is the Lamb that was slain; blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.*"

And then shall the Divine image be revealed in man. In the denizen of Eden it was but in embryo. In the pilgrim of the wilderness it was dark with shame and foul with sins. In the Man of sorrows the glory of manhood was unveiled, but the stain of tears was upon it, and the shadow of a great agony; in the Son of Man enthroned at God's right hand it shall at length be manifest, in the day of manifestation of the Son, and the sons; and then, and never till then, shall the prophecy of the form which was God's likeness in Eden be fulfilled, and the universe comprehend what God meant by Man.

And now, brethren, what is the deadly, damning sin of man? What is it which God's mercy cannot compassionate, and God's redemption cannot save? Not the nature which we bring into the world, not the infirmities and sins which grow out of it. The Lord bears witness against these in tones which, though full of tender compassion, are full of

an awful warning, for the end of these things is death. But these are but the fringes, as it were, of the essentially deadly sin, the sin which man makes for himself within the laboratory of his own life. It grows not out of infirmities of nature, but out of that malignant perverseness of heart into which the indulgence of the desires of the flesh and of the mind inevitably hardens at length. Brethren, everywhere, everywhen, from the first hour of man's transgression, to the last hour of the existence of the world, "*Herein is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, but men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.*" God made man to be redeemed; and "*God is in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself.*" The resisting that purpose, the refusing that reconciliation, the loving sin more than the merciful Saviour, the hell of self-will rather than the blessed and glorious heaven which is opened through the Gospel—this is the crowning, the damning sin, the sin from which there can be no release.

"The deaf may hear the Saviour's voice,
The fettered tongue its silence break,
But the deaf heart, the dumb by choice,
The laggard soul that will not wake,
The guilt that scorns to be forgiven,
These baffle even the spells of heaven."

The sin of humanity is the rejection of its

Saviour. This is the sin which man knows to be his own, the fruit of his free-will, the full, deliberate election of his spirit, the burden of which he must bear eternally.

The turning away from any light of God which is shining in him, the resisting of the Holy Spirit who is striving even in the children of disobedience, the closing of the door of the heart against the Light of the world, the Man of sorrows, who is standing there amid all its tangled weeds and briars, and pleading for an entrance—these make the true and final damnation; the eye which can bear that glance without melting into tenderness, the heart that remains bare and dry under the blessed dew of that love, the form that can stand before the Cross and make light of those dying agonies, and can trample under foot as an unholy thing, that most precious blood—this is the second and utter death.





Sermon IV.

Abounding Sin : Overabounding Grace.

“ Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound : that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.”—ROMANS V. 20, 21.

THESE words of St. Paul unfold to us some daring as well as profound thoughts. *“ The law entered that the offence might abound.”* And God sent it ; God would have the offence abundant. The sin was already there. Deep in the constitution of humanity the poison was already working, and God would have it developed, in broad, full, strong manifestation. The driving of evil out to the surface, where all can see it in the broad daylight, is, as in some deadly forms of fever, the first step towards the cure. But there is the revelation of a daring as well as a powerful intellect

in the broad simplicity of the statement. "*The law entered that the offence might abound.*" Paul had not ventured to entertain the thought unless he had known, as no man, save perhaps Luther, has ever known, the superabounding, the overmastering power of grace.

The infinite tenderness of God to sinners is the broad and blessed fact of the Gospel. To the uttermost, to the lowest depth of wickedness and misery, to the crumbling edge of the pit of perdition, to the last step, the last cry, the last gasp, He is able, willing, waiting, with intense desire to save. God's utter hatred of sin, and His fixed determination to uproot sin, lie, if I may so speak, underneath the everlasting Gospel. By righteousness alone, God's righteousness, can a soul be saved. But if sin be there in the heart let it work itself out, let the poison spread through the whole system, let the corruption taint the whole world, then grace shall reach it, grace shall rule it, grace shall cure and save its victims ; and so, " where sin abounded unto death, grace shall reign, through righteousness, unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord."

I suppose that the problem of problems, the difficulty of difficulties, the question over which chiefly souls have agonized through the long night, is, how can a righteous and loving God endure and even perpetuate the existence of a world like this? God

has not made it as it is. God made man upright, and the world an Eden. But God upholds it as it is; a touch, a breath, would abolish its sin and misery for ever. But it lives on; and, generation after generation, "the cry of the human," the cry of souls lost in darkness and writhing in pain, the shouts of the combatants, the moans of the wounded, the plaint of the wronged, the curses of the desperate, are rising up into the ear of God. Glorious and beautiful things God also looks upon; brave words, noble deeds, angelic ministries; but at what cost? God knoweth at what cost great deeds are done, and great ministries are accomplished in a world like this—and God alone! Life—the life of a human spirit—is, as we have said above, an awful endowment. By no act of ours it comes to us. It is forced upon us by a superior will, and struggle as we may, madden as we may, we can never lay it down. We must have it and hold it, and all the issues that spring out of it, through eternity.

And the influences which mould it are but partially under the control of our hand. There is a man who was educated to be a jail-bird from his infancy. He never had his young eye upon the form of a nobler life. You cannot say that there are no seeds of great thoughts and great virtues in him. He would be torn limb from limb before

he would betray his comrade in crime. But his chance in life has been a poor one compared with yours. His whole life is a battle with society ; he has a dim notion that that is his vocation ; and society masters him, chains him, and will infallibly crush him at last. Released for a moment from its iron grasp, in a week another daring crime has brought him again within its toils. His life is but a long misery, with no hope. And yet that man must live, must drag on his burden ; and passionately as he may long to die, body and soul, and have done with thought and feeling for ever—and who hears the cries that go up from dens of vice and prison-cells—it is God's will that, for good or for ill, he shall bear the burden of that life through eternity. He may mend his life ; God's mercy puts that within his reach ; but one thing God has settled for him absolutely, that if he will not mend it, he shall bear it, bear it for ever and for ever.

How many myriads, how many millions of men are there, in any given generation, who, were the choice offered to them to live on as they are living, or to die at once, body, soul, and spirit, would answer, " Let me die and have done with it for ever." Annihilation has been the supreme hope of many a creed which has had wide influence with men. And why ? Because "*Sin reigneth unto death*" everywhere. Life is good : the world is fair. The storms,

deserts, and earthquakes, would have no terror for man if there were not wilder storms and barer deserts within. Life were blessed in such a goodly world, if man could but be freed from the terror of himself. But self haunts him as a spectre. "*The things that I would, those I do not ; the things that I would not, those do I ;*" and the doing these things is death. Every day, every hour, man has forced on him the fact that, in some way, the responsibility of which he cannot shift off on God, he is out of harmony with his world, and in deadly discord with himself. And the sin reigns. Everywhere out of the sphere of grace, the revelation of the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord, the cry, the wild cry, is heard, "*O miserable man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death ?*" Here, then, are men by millions, living by no will of their own, bound to live whether they will or no, fighting a losing battle through life ; or refusing to fight it, and giving it up in despair, grovelling with the beasts, cursing with the fiends, filling the world with woe and wailing, and fattening its fairest plains with the blood, the flesh, the bones, of mangled and slaughtered men. Doubtless, there are a thousand lights as well as shadows in the picture. Here and there, even in Pagandom, there is a gleam of light so bright as to seem to have strayed down from the inner glory. But

looking at the broad world, the shadow masters the sunlight. Life is tragic. The daily lives of millions of our brother men is such that we should shudder at the prospect of living it. Take one day's honest service with a city missionary even in Christian England, and judge for yourselves. Nay, look behind the robes of the noblest peers and mightiest princes, and see with what heart-weariness they drag themselves through the round of their accustomed toils. "Sin reigns unto death." There is the "struggle for life" everywhere; but Death, if want, disease, and misery, are his lictors, everywhere wins the mastery, and parades the symbols of his reign.

Death is the broad term which covers the whole work of sin. Death is but the culmination of a process, all that leads to it is a part of the dying. The sickness, the weakness, the faintness of the powers, physical or spiritual; the dulling of the sensations, the collapse of the faculties, the satisfaction with lower and yet lower objects and pleasures, each of them exhausted in turn, as body and soul drop down to a still lower grade; the gradual extinction of all the energies and affections; the eclipse of everything which makes life worth the living, worth the having—this is death, and death is the hallmark of sin, and you may trace it broad and deep over the whole human world. A world dead in

sin, yet doomed never to die—for existence under such conditions is the most awful of all dooms. And there is no refuge, save for a moment, in the thought that God is merciful, and will not by too heavy a hand of punishment make existence an eternal curse to the souls who but dimly knew the will they defied. But what is the punishment of a spirit? What matters a lighter or heavier burden to a man, whose chief torment is himself—the sin which is in him, and which reigns in him unto death. All the tortures whose forms Dante ever chiselled in word, or Orcagna ever preached in colour, would be gladly welcomed by the poor lost spirit, if they could but heal the welling wound, or soothe the gnawing misery within. The sinner carries his torment with him—a life poisoned at the springs, a life which God will not suffer him to lay down; though he pray with an agony of prayer to be rid of it, it is his, and he must bear it eternally. Hence the raging passion, the bitter strife, the burning hate, the weary misery, that wastes the world. It is all the hell-born reign of Death.

And Paul has the daring sentence, “The law, sent of God, entered that the offence might abound.” Many, startled, try to soften the words. “God hath sent the law to correct, but its result was the increase of sin,” is the sense to which they would modify it. But the words will not bear it, and the

argument refuses to adopt it. God sent the law that the offence might abound, knowing that it would abound, and intending that it should abound. Not *sin*—that is, the sinful thought and purpose—but the offence, the act and manifestation of sin. God intended it to abound. The poison there, it should not lurk there; it should be fostered, pressed into full development; it should break out in the plague-sores of vice and misery which overspread the world; while within, deep in the fountains of the life, He would be embreathing by grace that quickening power which would drive it forth, not *to* the surface, but *through* the surface, and cast it out for ever. This is the apostle's thought; and its affirmation is conspicuously sustained by history.

“The law entered.” “The Mosaic law,” say cautious commentators, “with all its minute regulations, difficult and impossible to fulfil, which made men despair of legal obedience, and prepared them to receive the righteousness which is by faith.” I think the larger view the true one. All law, all manifestation of God's commandment, in any form, in a sin-loving, God-hating world, has for its first fruit the insurrection of human passion and self-will. Every declaration of the character and the will of God to sinners seems at first but to madden the spirit and blacken the tone of their

transgression. "Sin by the commandment becomes exceeding sinful." It is true of all dispensations of law, and all revelations of God, even the highest. When men saw the Father in the Son they hated Him; and the hatred of the generation to which the revelation was made, broke out in the most deadly, damning crime in the history of the universe. *"Ye men of Israel, bear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by Him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain."* The revelation reprov'd, and by reprov'ing maddened the sinner. Only when the grace, the love, with which the revelation was charged, penetrated, as light, and air, and heat, and dew, can penetrate, the hard crust of their natures—a grace and love made conspicuous by the abounding offence, by the master-crime, in which the transgression culminated—only then could men begin to understand the counsel developed in the text. *"Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord."* Every manifestation of

light at first seems but to reveal darkness. Every manifestation of God at first seems but to deepen and darken sin. The great revelation developed the great transgression, and through that, "grace has reigned, through righteousness, unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord." It is the way of God; like all His ways, wonderful and past finding out. Transgression driven to act itself out, and brought thereby more fully within reach of healing influences. The great transgression being the great crisis, the grand turning-point in the moral history of the world. It was over the prodigal—was it not?—the poor, barefoot, feckless prodigal come home, and not over the correct and calculating elder, that they sang, "*It is meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy son was dead, but he is alive again; he was lost, but he is found.*"

Let us consider as follows:—

I. Grace.

II. The relation between grace and sin.

III. The relation between grace and righteousness.

IV. The complete and final end of God.

I. Grace.

Here are the two antagonists—grace and sin. Both would be kings; one only has the power to reign. Grace is not just synonymous with love, though love is at the heart of it. It is love in a

certain relation—the love of a Redeemer working to its ends. It represents the whole sum of the forces and influences by which the love that would redeem aims at the accomplishment of its hope. Its incarnation is Christ. The Lord Christ is the gift of grace ; the glory of Christ is the glory of grace ; at His coronation-day grace will be crowned. *“Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, how, though He was rich, for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be made rich.”* Grace is the manifestation and action of that fatherly love—yea, to the prodigal and rebellious also—which could not rest in its native glory and blessedness, while one prodigal was wandering, hungry and footsore in the wilderness ; while one tear was wept, one groan was uttered in the universe, which its suffering and sacrifice might spare. It is the love with which a father pities, and bears with, and seeks to bring home a truant ; with which a gracious king would kill treason at the heart. A pleading, patient, yearning love ; whose only measures are the weary journeys of the stricken form of the Man of Sorrows about this earth’s sad pathways, and the tear-drops, the blood-drops, that bestain His steps ; the agony of effort to endure a pressure which was beyond all mortal bearing ; the horror of darkness which gathered round His spirit as the burden of the Cross fell on

Him ; the anguish that rent, that literally burst His heart, as the prayer for His murderers broke from His lips, "*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*" Brethren, ye know the grace of the Lord Jesus, but the measure of it One only knows. That grace is the reigning conqueror of sin. That triumphs where law fails. That is the force, the overmastering force, which the Lord has won—I use the word with reverence, has won by sacrifice and suffering ; whereby and wherefore He bears, or seems to bear, with such strange patience, all the wrong and the woe of the world. He bore it, He bears it, because He foresaw that where sin *multiplied* (the term abounding is kept for grace), grace would (not "much more," the term is superlative, not comparative) very mightily, most mightily *abound* ; so "*that as sin hath reigned unto death, grace shall reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.*"

II. The relation between grace and sin.

1. Sin is the condition of its manifestation. No sin, no grace, and none of that special glory which grace alone can win—the glory of the Redemption of the world. We are on difficult ground here ; but Paul treads with bold as well as careful steps. It is sin that calls grace to action. Through a lost world Christ is to win His most glorious crown. The thought may again rise here in some minds,

“Then it is all God’s work, both the sin and the salvation. He made the sin, that He might make the salvation. The two are His complete thought, the one essential to the other, as two hemispheres complete a world.” There is confusion of thought here ; God cannot make sin, for it would cease to be sin if He made it. He cannot make man to sin. Again, it would cease to be sin if it was the inevitable result of any act or thought of God. He made man upright and free ; He saw the choice of freedom, He foresaw sin reigning unto death. He perpetuates man, and upholds the world in which sin riots, that grace may have time and room. Sin being born by man’s will into the world, a higher order of things, a higher life for man, a richer glory for God, becomes possible, through the abounding wealth and power of that grace which, but for transgression, had ever remained pent up, without vent or flow in His heart. Grace and sin are the twin antagonists ; opposed as heat and cold, light and darkness, cosmos and chaos. If one reigns, the other is destroyed ; and God suffers sin to be born because He knows that grace can conquer it, strip its spoils, and reign in triumph over worlds which His victory has glorified eternally.

2. There is a glory which no fiat of Omnipotence even can create, which grace, by the conquest of sin, can win and wear through eternity.

No sin, no grace, and, in the highest sense, no glory. The joy of the prodigal come home, the joy of the father in his return ; these are the glorious joys of earth, of heaven. Some of you have prodigals wandering far ; your love clings to them still, and draws them with a magnetism which, like all mightiest things, is all invisible, to your side. The moment when you clasp them once more and seat them by your hearth-fire, will be the culminating joy of your pilgrimage here. It is the earthly share of the great joy and glory of heaven. God Himself pictures it. The Father had two sons. His relation to the one is peaceful, happy, contented :—“ *And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment.*” Rights and claims are recognized on both sides, and duties are fulfilled. But there is no glow about it ; the light is that of a cold wintry day ; all is right, just, and sound, but there is no enthusiasm, no passionate exuberant joy filling the house with songs. We must turn to the other picture for that :—“ *And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his ser-*

vants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him ; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet : And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it ; and let us eat, and be merry : For this my son was dead, and is alive again ; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry." There is a child who has learnt what a father's love is worth by the loss of it ; the value of daily bread, by pining hunger ; of the holy order of a home, by squalor, filth, and rags. He has learnt more. He knows now how long the fatherly heart can cling to the wanderer ; how deeply the child's image is stamped into the father's love ; how quickly the aged eye lights up when the dear form, though in dust and rags, appears in the distance ; how, even a great way off, the father's tenderness, with sobs and kisses, clasps him, and brings him, the reckless, guilty prodigal, home ; how the house has a new joy, the home a new glory, when he enters it, rings out a welcome, and pours its treasures at his feet ; and how the father and child restored in that solemn and holy union, of which the bands are a father's grace and a son's passionate tenderness and devotion, find that in each other of which the son, at any rate, had not dared even to dream.

The one picture is Adam in Eden, the other is Adam in Heaven.

III. The relation between grace and righteous-

ness. Grace must reign through righteousness, if it reign at all. Imputed righteousness, some cry ; inherent righteousness, others. Neither the one nor the other, I venture to think. The apostle has a broader meaning, which covers both. Inherent righteousness is a vain show, if it be not rooted in a higher righteousness, in the perfect righteousness ; while imputed righteousness is a mere fiction, if no image of itself be generated in the soul. Righteousness ! Sin is the condition of grace on the one hand, righteousness on the other. Without sin it has no object, without righteousness it has no way to its end. The broad principle here, and I can only deal with the broad principle, may be thus expressed :—

1. None but a righteous soul can be a blessed soul.

2. The righteousness of grace has a glory and a blessedness all its own.

1. The righteous soul alone is blessed.

To some, grace may suggest another idea. Mercy, compassion, gentleness, to the sinner ; a kindly passing over his transgression, and a remission of the penalty which it had incurred. I say again, that were feasible enough if a man's worst torment and curse were not himself. Pardon is a slight thing to a man who cannot pardon himself. "Go in peace, be happy," were but an idle word to the

man who bears about the elements of a deadly discord, a crushing misery within. The man wants to be at one with himself, by finding all his powers and passions at one with God. "*Unite my heart to fear thy name,*" is his persistent cry. "Unloose my bands and let me be free; expel the poison and let me live." The problem to be solved is within; there the fountain of bitter waters has to be healed. There a law of God is inscribed on fleshly tablets, and it is exigent of its honour; a law which tells him, with a tone which all the voices of the universe hushing him to peace could not master, that till he can love and begin to live it, sin is reigning in him, and must reign unto death. And it is there that grace reigns through righteousness. An inward harmony, an inward healing, an inward quickening is its promise; it presents to him a righteousness which is as a man's righteousness, and yet is God's; a righteousness which he can believe in and love; a righteousness not awfully, hopelessly above him; a righteousness at hand, and not afar off; a righteousness which, while his sad worn heart drinks in, as deserts drink in the dew, the love which streams from the dying sacrifice on Calvary, enters with love's "joyous entry," and enshrines itself in his heart.

2. The righteousness which is by grace has a glory and blessedness which is all its own. Grace reigns through righteousness; it is a joyous, glorious

reign. The work of grace is to shrine righteousness in man's heart of hearts ; to teach him not to obey it only, not to honour it only, but to love it ; to love it with a passion that would die for it, as He loved it whose coronation anthem thus was sung :—
“ Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever : a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity ; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.” It is not the shadow of His own perfect righteousness, which is unto all and upon all them that believe, which God seeks to behold everywhere. Not the shadow, but as it were the branches, spreading everywhere with a heart of life in them, and filling with living greenness the world. The righteousness came and was incarnate, that men might love it, yea, with a lover's passion. Loving Christ, clasping Christ, it is God's own righteousness which man loves and holds. Through love, he has a joy in all righteous thoughts and righteous deeds, which is part of his joy in Christ his Saviour. It is the Lord's life, into the fellowship of which he is entering ; it is the Lord's great end which he is learning to pursue ; it is the Lord's glory, the glory of the Redeemer, whose love has won a world to righteousness, whose lustre he is making more intense and resplendent ; it is the Lord's joy, the joy of Christ in His

righteous redeemed ones, of which he is filling the high measure through eternity. Grace can only bless through righteousness. The righteousness of grace has a glory and a blessedness all its own.

IV. The complete and final end of God. "*Unto eternal life.*"

Death is simply isolation. The cutting the body off from free communion with its world. The eye can no more drink in the sunlight, the lungs the vital air, the stomach the vital food. They are there all round it, but it is dead to them, cut off from all communion and ministry. Thrown on its own internal resources it preys on itself, wastes itself until there is no more to waste, and then drops down into the rottenness and nothingness of the grave.

And what is life? The opposite of isolation. It is the faculty of communion with all things—receiving their tributes, and repaying them with fruits. The intensity of this power of communion—of the eye to commune with the light, of the ear to commune with the music of the world, of the lungs to draw down into the deep recesses of the frame the universal air—is the measure of the life of the body. Nor is it otherwise with the life within. The soul's death is the paralysis of its faculty to all that a soul was made to commune with, till it becomes without truth, righteousness, and holiness, without God and without hope, because without

life. The soul's quickening is the rekindling of the energy of its powers, the re-occupation of the glorious range of its faculty to commune with, to possess, and to enjoy all that God has made a soul to live for, all whereby a soul may live eternally.

The work of grace is as the baptism of a new life for man. The eye kindles again when it feels the inspiration, the blood glows, the limbs and organs of the spirit brace themselves to new vigour and swiftness, while a solemn joy fills the heart, which is unspeakable and full of glory. Alive to God ! alive to all this goodly universe ! alive to all the splendour and bliss of the new creation, which God will bring forth from the womb of the death to which all things haste that they may rise transfigured ; above all, alive to Him ! This is the vision which He sets before Himself, beyond all the woe and the wrong of Time. The innumerable company of the living, living as He lives, and able to live like Him, who shall come forth from the great tribulation of earth, to fill His New Jerusalem with songs, to crowd His new creation with sons ; prodigals come home, who shall love Him with a passionate devotion, and serve Him with a joyous energy, whose springs shall renew themselves at the fountain of His love eternally :—
“ And I looked, and lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with Him an hundred forty and four thou-

sand, having His Father's name written in their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps: and they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth." One hundred and forty and four thousand; a square number, symmetrical with the Divine idea. How far that idea stretches who shall dare to guess. There is the vision. "*Worthy is the Lamb that was slain;*" there is the song. This is what the Saviour sees and hears beyond the wastes of time. And then, then, when the whole company is gathered home, and the Father's house is ringing with the songs of the return, then will all which has filled the earth with wailing be forgotten; then will He who bore the shame and agony of Calvary see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied; then will the memory of the joy and beauty of Eden be eclipsed for ever in the excelling splendour and bliss of heaven.

"*Lord, are there few that be saved?*" The Lord gives no answer but the text. This we know, that the end which God foresees shall repair all the waste, and repay all the sorrow with which sin has filled the world. How wide, how vast, how

glorious this work of overabounding grace, which of us may dare to guess? “*But strive thou to enter in at the strait gate.*” The end for which the Redeemer is waiting, the issue for which heaven is hoping, depend in their measure upon you. You can frustrate, you can forward the great consummation. You can cross, or you can carry into more glorious completeness, the eternal counsel of the Father, that “where sin abounded grace should much more abound; that as sin had reigned unto death, even so should grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Have you learnt the notes of that new song which none but the redeemed can know? Is Christ the joy and hope of your being? Is freedom from sin, a larger, freer, purer, more Christlike life, the one pining desire of your heart? Be patient, then, and still brace yourself to hope and to endure. Fight the good fight of faith; endure the hardness of the present discipline; lift the cross and bear it bravely to the end; for God’s eye foresees the day which from yours is veiled, the day of universal deliverance, the day of restitution of all things, the day of the unveiling of the new creation, where grace, having cast out sin, shall have enthroned righteousness for ever—the day of the manifestation of the sons of God.



Sermon V.

The Penitent's Creed.

“ He looketh upon men, and if any say, I have sinned, I have perverted that which was right, and it profited me not ; He will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light.”—JOB XXXIII. 27, 28.



NEVER open the book of Job without fresh wonder at the wealth of Christian thought and feeling which it contains. There is a very deep sense in which Christianity is older than the Incarnation. The Word *was* from the beginning, not in solitary majesty and splendour, but “rejoicing in the habitable parts of the earth, and His delights were with the sons of men.” The day is older than the dawn, because the sun is older than both of them. The grand thoughts about

God and man, about the soul, truth, righteousness, and holiness, which Colenso and other searchers may find embedded in the mud of Pagan literature, mark the early dawning of that light of the sun of truth, the living Word, whose beams were in the fulness of time to shine with meridian splendour on the world. But man was made to live, not in the dawn, but in the daylight. The fact that there were foreshinings of the Advent, heralds of the expected One in all nations, but made it the more certain that the Desire of all Nations must at the appointed time appear. But there is one fountain both of the dawn and of the daylight; and what gleams of truth were shooting athwart the darkness of the pagan sky, were the rays of that advancing sun.

Among the books of the Old Testament, in which the light was openly enshrined—planets set in the pagan night that the darkness might not be utter and desperate—none seems to me to shine with a fuller, steadier lustre than this Book of Job. It seems to lift itself, like its kindred Sinai, high above the level of the surrounding darkness, and to catch, while night is on all the desert, the full glow of that dayspring which was rising to irradiate the world. The thoughts of it, the very idea of it, are Christian to the core. The Word, who was with God, but who was in the world from

the beginning, was with the man who wrote this book. It is Divine truth which it utters, it is Divine wisdom which it unfolds, it is Divine love which it reveals, as behind all the struggle and the suffering which God sends for the discipline of mankind. Nowhere is there a grander, clearer cry for a Mediator than in the sublime passage, "*For He is not a man, as I am, that I should answer Him, and we should come together in judgment. Neither is there any daysman betwixt us, that might lay his hand upon us both. Let Him take His rod away from me, and let not His fear terrify me: then would I speak, and not fear Him; but it is not so with me.*" And nowhere is there a more comprehensive description of his qualifications and office than in the very chapter from which I have taken my text. "*Behold, I am according to thy wish in God's stead: I also am formed out of the clay. Behold, my terror shall not make thee afraid, neither shall my hand be heavy upon thee.*" There are those who believe that Elihu is *the* Mediator. That the Angel who dwelt in the bush, who was with the church in the wilderness, with Joshua before Jericho, with Gideon by the threshing-floor, was, in the person of Elihu, with the patriarch—the daysman, the man who could lay his hand upon both, the Emmanuel of Job. I cannot accept that view. Elihu is humanly partial and imperfect like

the rest. He has the freshness, the fire, the frank honesty of youth; while genius gives him the easy superiority over the dry moralities and antiquated formularies of the friends. But he falls short of the highest wisdom, though he is inspired to utter some of the deepest, truest, most blessed thoughts which are to be found in the whole word of God. There is the whole philosophy of mediation in the passage which I have just quoted. There is the whole philosophy of penitence in the text. The essential principles are all here. I know not anywhere a fuller exposition of the act of the soul in repenting than these words set forth. "*He looketh upon men, and if any say, I have sinned, I have perverted that which was right, and it profited me not; He will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light.*" I shall ask you to consider with me,

I. The creed of penitence.

II. The confession of penitence.

III. The fruit of penitence through the redeeming mercy and grace of God.

I. The creed of penitence.

1. An absolute good and evil, right and wrong. There are those in whose sight the burden of a guilty conscience is but a bad form of hypochondria. The agony of a soul under a sense of its sin, of the tyranny which it exercises, and the

misery which it works, is for such but a morbid condition of the system ; as Mr. Emerson somewhere says, "The mumps and measles of the soul," needing a wise physician, rather than the blood of atonement ; time and a good constitution, rather than a divine cure. There are many able men in our country at this day, "who profess and call themselves Christians," and who take a busy part in all the higher activities and movements of our times, who simply smile at the experience of a guilt-burdened sinner ; who, if you speak to them of the witness of the human conscience to God's righteousness and holiness as demanding an atonement—of the impossibility of peace, except on the conditions which God has laid down in His word—of the unrest and misery of a spirit which, conscious not of transgression only, but of a fatal proneness to transgress, not of sins only but of *sin*, has never been brought by faith into the peace of God—will tell you that it is a mere delusion, a morbid moral state, to be treated seriously and even reverently as a solemn reality to the sufferer, but having no other reality, no ground in the mind of God toward the sinner, and the way of God in the forgiveness of souls. They tell us that if a man can but feel that all this care and pain is foolish and useless, throw himself on the simple goodness of God to forget the past, and strive to do better for

the future, that is all that God requires—then all is well, all is peace.

It is not the creed of the penitent ; and while the world lasts, the penitent's creed will express the conviction and feeling of mankind. "*For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.*" "*There is no man that doeth good, and sinneth not.*" "*Enter not into judgment with thy servants, O Lord God, for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.*" "*Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before thee, and I am no more worthy to be called thy son.*" At the root of this creed lies the conviction which I am considering in this head of my discourse. Right and wrong, good and evil, are fixed and absolute opposites. Opinions of men may vary, the good of one country may be the evil of another, the right of one age may be the wrong of the next, but the things themselves do not vary ; they abide immutable, because there is One who knows them and before whom they are real, who abides immutable ; and they, receiving not sanctions or judgments from men, are the judges of men, and settle it absolutely for men whether it shall be well with them or no. A Malay may believe that it is good to be a thief, so that the thieving be done cleverly. An Englishman may believe that it is good to be honest. It is not a matter of indifference to the inner as well as to the outer life of the one and of

the other whether they change convictions or no, so that they adopt them thoroughly. The one stands so far square with the law which rules the great universe, in tune with all things around him, and in the way of their blessings ; while the other is in contempt of that law, in collision with all realities around him, seen and unseen, and in the way of their curse. The devil may try to persuade us it is all one. It is two, and two for ever. There is a right which is God's rule in the soul, and in the universe ; there is a wrong which is the devil's counterfeit of God's rule. All the force of Heaven, were it put forth, could not make the wrong beautiful and blessed ; all the force of Hell could not make the right foul and accursed. The one remains the principle of order and the fountain of blessing to all intelligent creatures, the other the source of sorrow and the principle of discord. For them to change their essential natures is as impossible as for God to change. Equally impossible is it for man to escape their judgments. He that doeth righteously shall be blessed, he that doeth unrighteously shall be cursed, in any age, in any country, in any world. The idea that it does not matter much what a man believes so that he believes it heartily, justified as it seems to be by the number of good men of all creeds that you meet with, cannot stand. In the first place, it is

impossible in a large sense of the term, in the only true sense of the term, to get at the whole creed of a man. Just as there are unwritten laws which have their sphere of power, so there are unspoken, unspeakable beliefs haunting the inner chambers of every man's nature, which make his uttered creed a very partial representation of that belief which moulds his life. Then practically, and very much in virtue of these unspoken beliefs, a man's formal creed, that by which you label him in your catalogue, may bear a very imperfect relation indeed to his moral and spiritual state before God as a lover of truth and righteousness. He may be better or worse than his creed would justify you in supposing, and in spite of it. Again, there are limits of divergence of opinion and judgment on moral and spiritual questions, within which their effect on the character, though real, is as difficult to trace as a law of storms in the variable belt of the world's atmosphere; while beyond those limits you may trace the reflex action of belief very readily indeed. You may say in the same way of a healthy man, that it does not much matter what he eats. There are limits within which it is true; but if he take to straying beyond those limits and eat arsenic or nightshade, it matters everything; it becomes, even to the healthiest, matter of life or of death. And thus it is with the right, the good, and

the true. They are absolute and unchangeable in their essence. Man does not make them. The solemn expression of the opinion of a world cannot unmake them. All the forces of the universe would be too weak to bar an obedient soul, nation, or world, from their blessing, or to shield the disobedient from their curse. To believe this is the first step to a true penitence. Until a man sees this in all its grand and awful reality, his penitence is but the fright of his ignorance at the shadow of itself.

2. I have perverted that which is right.

This is the second article of the penitent's confession of faith, and full of terrible meaning, as those who have passed through the agony know full well. "*I have perverted.*" The anguish of that "*I*" on a penitent's lip! No man knows what "*I*" means, but the man who has felt himself isolated from God by transgression, alone responsible for it, alone bound to bear it, a solitary soul in a universe of solitude; for of all the thronging myriads of beings who fill it, there is not one who can lift, or even share, the burden of his sin. It is the transgressor who knows what the burden of existence is, laden with a weight which he must bear though it crush him, the burden of which he cannot cast on God. We cannot wonder that in all ages the intellect of man has made even despe-

rate attempts to escape from this dread isolation, and to connect with God in some way the burden of his sin. "*I have perverted the right.*" What means this "I?" Did not God make it, and is not God responsible for it? If the right is of God's making, who in the universe can mar? Philosophy has pressed these questions in more or less subtle forms on the intellect of each generation, but ultimately it is all summed up in the question in which St. Paul concentrates it, "*Who hath resisted His will?*" "I am what God has made me. I can but do what God has made me to do. There is, there can be, no such thing as freedom. God is absolute and omnipotent in the universe; there is, there can be, but one will in the universe, or God ceases to be God." This is the barest form of the Pantheistic argument against moral responsibility, and consequent excuse for sin. According to this philosophy, there is, strictly speaking, no such thing as sin. Man sins like a sullen dog, or a vicious horse. It is a fact about him, a very noteworthy and unpleasant fact to others it may be, but that is all. He is a creature of infinitely higher endowment than dog or horse, and touched to infinitely finer issues, but still he is no more than the finest stop in that great organ, the creation, which gives forth its music under the breath and the hand of God. The penitent sweeps all this to

the winds. It may be very difficult to square the conception of moral freedom with any definitions of God in the abstract which satisfy the intellect, but the penitent is not stopped by the difficulty. Arguments as to what God can do or cannot do, as to whether freedom is a possible or an impossible conception in any intelligent scheme of the universe, are to him but as filmy gossamer before a strong man's tread. When the soul first sees the Divine lawgiver, and asks itself the momentous questions on which hang its eternity, the "I" is the dread reality. One thing is clear to him as the sun at noon, that there is that within him which, whatever it may be, distinctly is not God. This "I" is the reality which millions of hopeless Buddhists at this moment supremely dread. "O God! could I but get away from my-self; might I but lose it, lay it down, let it be absorbed in thee!" But God is not the sinner, and the sinner knows it. Sin isolates him, sets him apart; and God teaches him, through sin, what is meant by "himself." A being having within himself the springs of his eternal woe or weal, bound to live on while God lives, with a burden which he must bear, though it crushes, torments, and curses him; to get rid of which he will fling himself under the bloody wheels of Juggernaut, or into the sullen, sacred stream, but which he finds again, in the first moment of con-

sciousness beyond the river, heavier, more crushing than ever, and which he must lift and bear eternally.

Do you know what it is to hate yourself, and yet to feel that you can never get rid of yourself? You might tear yourself bit by bit till every fibre and thread of your wondrous texture is unravelled; not a particle as big as a grain of dust may survive of what seemed to be you; and yet you, the "I" in you, survives it, and smiles scornfully on the wreck. The penitent, at any rate, knows that there is something within him which is not God, which is capable of resisting God, of perverting that which is right in the sight of God, of becoming an object of repulsion to God, the word of whose nature as well as of whose lips is, inevitably, "*Depart from me, ye that work iniquity.*" That power is in me, and I have used it. I have perverted that which was right. I have seen the right, and chosen the wrong, and I knew that I, and not God, was making the choice, and that I was choosing in spite of God. In the clear daylight of truth I have followed vanity and lies, and they have led me down into darkness and the valley of the shadow of death. I have corrupted the spring of my spirit's innocence and purity; I have established a propensity which drags me down ever lower and lower towards the pit. The light is there, but behind me. I am leaving

it; daily it grows dimmer, and the darkness is gathering round *me*. God! "thou art justified when thou speakest, and clear when thou judgest." Thou hast witnessed, thou hast striven. *I* have resisted; *I* have perverted that which was right, is right, and will be right for ever. My blood is on my own head. My sin lieth at my door. *I* must answer it before the Judge.

3. *And it profited me not.*

It is the third and final article of a penitent's creed about sin. "*What profit have ye had in those things whereof ye are now ashamed, for the end of those things is death?*" "THE WAGES OF SIN IS DEATH." Many a reckless sinner goes on madly in his career of transgression till ruin stares him in the face, till a sight of the deadly dart, wielded by a ghastly hand, brings him to a pause. Perhaps he feels its cold point grazing against the shuddering flesh, and shrinks back appalled. "IT PROFITED ME NOT." If any other confession than this were possible for a sinner in the long run, and after full experience of an evil way, it would simply mean that the righteous God had ceased to be the ruler of the world. Can sin stand the test of possession? Is it proof against satiety? Given its end, can it rest in it and be blessed? If it can, then the Atheist is right: there is no God. For this test of profit is the ultimate test to which

everything will be practically brought. If a man can solemnly feel that he is more blessed in serving the devil than in obeying God; that every power of his being finds its freest and most joyous development, and every latent faculty its truest education, in that work; that every pulse of pleasure is exhilarated, and every throb of pain soothed and stilled thereby; that his peace is perfect and his heaven serene; that he glories in the service, and asks no better than to live by it, and to die by it—I say, if this could be the solemn testimony of a man's spirit in a life of sin, it would be hard, by any abstract demonstrations about righteousness, to get him to change it for what you might think a higher and a nobler way. He saith, “The old is better.” It fills him with blessedness; it inspires him with hope; why should he change? But while God lives, this blessedness is absolutely impossible to sin. God witnesses by word against the essential nature of evil; His law denounces it as hateful in His sight. And He witnesses against it by its fruits. These, at any rate, shall bear testimony for the Ruler; these, at any rate, shall obey His will. Here we touch the limit of the free-will of man. In self-determination he is omnipotent; he is powerless as to results. What a man wills, too, he may do. God places no obstacle to his doing anything which he may please,

which is within the wondrous compass of his powers. There is nothing whatever to hinder his resolving to strike a knife into the heart of the next man that he may meet; and but little to hinder his doing it. But there his power ends—God's power begins. Laws are at work, in whose grasp he is powerless, which drag him to prison, and hang him at length as a dog for his crime. There is nothing to hinder your resolving to go out and spend the night in a foul debauch, and but little to hinder your doing it. The means, alas! are at hand all round you—you can go. But, then, nothing can help your going forth on the morrow with a pallid face, a sodden eye, a shaking hand; sick and heart-sick; unstrung, unmanned; feeling and looking like a beast. You can go this moment if you will; that is your power. You must suffer shame and wretchedness for it; that is God's. You can, if you like, be a bear in your home. You can make your wife tremble at the sight of you, and your children cower or shrink into dark corners from the kick or the curse, which is the only greeting that they know. But no power of yours can help your home being a bear-garden; your wife sullen, dirty, reckless; your children deceitful, vicious, indolent; and your soul a very hot-bed for forcing into early fruitage vice, misery, and despair. You can do the one, God does the other; and He asks

you to balance the account. Settle it fairly you shall. You do your will as to actions, He will have His will done as to results. And He asks you to look at the balance. Does it tempt you to go on? I know that it is dead against you. You are bankrupt already. It must be so inevitably, unless your arm be stronger than God's. Here is the hold which God keeps on men. They may scar out the lines which He inscribes on the fleshy tablet of every heart as witnesses to Him and to His truth; they may harden their hearts and deafen their ears to every direct appeal from heaven. He may thunder His commandments in vain. But so long as men can suffer He can reach them; so long as they can feel the thorns and the goads, He can make them understand the deadliness of sin. So long as there lurks one faintest desire for the happiness which man was made to seek and enjoy, there is something which God can lay hold upon; there is a hook in the nostril of the foulest passions, the fiercest lusts, by which there is a hope that He may tame them and make them submissive to His will.

Such is the theory. And now let us apply the practical test of it. What fruit have you had off this tree of sin? You have known something of the great realities of life; some of you have travelled far on the pilgrimage; you have plucked

fruit enough off this tree to know well what it is worth. I see grey hairs here, and furrowed brows. Experience, life's cares and sorrows, have chased those lines. Your witness would be worth something. Is it for God or for the devil? Lift up your hand now and tell us, Is sin the loved and honoured mistress of your lives? Is the remembrance of all that sin and self-will have done for you so sweet that you ask no better than to love their ways, and to follow them for ever? Do *you* glory in your service, and in its fruits? Do you set yourself forth as a witness of how blessed a thing it is to grasp, and hoard, and drink, and game, and hate, and lust. One testified of old thus, concerning the ways of God: "*Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in His law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.*" "*The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing; to show that the Lord is upright: He is my*

rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him." Are you ready to set yourself forth in opposition, as a witness of the goodness of the ways of sin? Look round you. Search the neighbourhood of your own home. Is it the drunkard, the roysterer, the lazy, idle, tattling, guzzling workman, whose home seems to you most cheerful, bright, and happy? Don't you think that you could go through any neighbourhood, and put a mark on the doors of the sober, steady, industrious, God-fearing men and women? Would you not know them in a moment by the peace, the order, the cleanness, the comfort that reign within? Why, homes are just like faces. Some have a cheery smile, some have a sullen frown. Some look just like a drunkard. He is there staggering home, with hot, flushed face, truculent eye, and lowering brow. You see that he is going home to kick and to curse, and to do worse things, of which drink is at the root. The man's home is like his face; God makes the devil set his mark upon it, and the mark says to all men, "Beware." And there is the neat, tidy, comely, happy-looking housewife, who has just swept the hearth, given the children the last touch, and set the table for her hard-working husband's tea. Her house smiles and shines as well as her countenance. God sets His own mark there, and every one who looks upon it

feels that there is something there which inspires confidence and hope. Can you deny that in the long run the devil's service sets its mark on men, a mark which all men instinctively shrink from? The miser, the wanton, the drunkard, the idler, get a look which even the least observant note, and beware. I suppose, too, that even the most ardent votaries of pleasure will confess that its pursuit is its chief charm. The world's good cannot stand the test of possession. There is a burning thirst, an insatiate longing, with which it fills the soul; it cries ever, "Give, give, give." Nothing can stay the cry, nothing can stifle it, and least of all success. One world conquered, it moans restlessly for another. The larger the conquest, the larger the pain. No man can rest in acquisitions. To acquire is his instinct, and, as he heaps to himself worldly treasures and pleasures, and is insatiate still—still longing, still pining—the thought will steal on him, "I have made a grand mistake, *the* grand mistake. I have all I aimed at; I have spent my life in the acquisition, and it profiteth me nothing—a great heartache is all that I have gained. I have aroused a thirst which a universe of possession cannot satisfy. My doom is the doom of Tantalus. The waters are round me, but when I stoop to drink, they vanish; the dry, hot sand occupies their room. The boughs loaded with

rich fruit are above me ; but, when I lift my hand in the agony of my hunger, they sweep up beyond my reach. Is there any good ? Is there anything that profiteth anywhere ? Is there anything in the wide universe which a man can possess and be at rest ?” The answer to the question is—the Gospel. Man has an infinite in him, something which he caught from the inspiring breath of God. Nothing with limits can satisfy him finally ; in God only can he find his end and be at rest. “ *Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money ; come ye, buy, and eat ; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread ? and your labour for that which satisfieth not ? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.*” “ *Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven ; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. Then said they unto Him, Lord, evermore give us this bread. And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life : he that cometh to me shall never hunger ; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.*”

I have sketched the creed of the penitent. The confession of the penitent, and the answer of God, which is the penitent's Gospel, I shall handle in the next discourse.

“If any *say* I have sinned, I have perverted that which was right, and it profited me not ; He will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light.”





Sermon VI.

The Penitent's Gospel.

"He looketh upon men, and if any say, I have sinned, I have perverted that which was right, and it profited me not; He will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light."—JOB XXXIII. 27, 28.

THE first verse contains the penitent's creed; the second, the substance of the Gospel. "*I have sinned, I have perverted that which was right, and it profited me not.*" It is the whole confession of human sin, its reality, its essence, its fruits. This book touches the depths—the depth of man, the depth of God. Its writer had the longest plummet-line which the men of old time were able to drop into the abyss of the Divine counsels. He gauged the mystery, though he could not solve it: the key was not with him,

though he could instruct us where to look for it—in the daysman who should explain and justify, as the God-Man alone could explain and justify, the dark and far-reaching methods of the Fatherly discipline of God. I regard the cry for a mediator, with which the book of Job seems to me to be charged, as one of the chief of those “spiritual things” in the Old Testament Scripture, which, be the difficulties of these old records what they may, make the Old Testament one book with the New. We do not find it simply in an isolated passage in this ancient drama of sorrow; it runs through the whole of it, and is in some sort its key. Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar—the sages charged with the hoary wisdom of the past—the young and brilliant Elihu, full even to distention with the new wine of genius, and freighted with the eloquent wisdom of the present, offer themselves successively as God’s expositors. But the sufferer will not hear them. His cry is “for God, for the living God,” and this is the real essence of the book. On this, as the spinal column, the whole form depends; for books may be vertebrate as well as men. The cry grows more earnest as the pitiless mongers of orthodox platitudes are successively silenced, and it is answered at length by the appearing of the Lord himself. He came with lightning and tempest, and out of the whirlwind the awful challenge broke.

But still He came. The cry was heard, the day-man appeared; the passionate appeal of this agonized spirit was not stifled, but answered; and a prophecy of the Incarnation was given to the world.

Sin, confession, and forgiveness, or rather restoration, are the themes of these verses; and they are treated with a brevity and simplicity, but at the same time with a profound truth and completeness, which is characteristic of all the spiritual utterances of the book. "*If any say, I have sinned.*" That implies fundamentally that evil is not of God. God has made a being capable of sin, but God has not made sin, God is not responsible for sin, God hates it with a deadly hatred, and His sentence on it, which He lives to execute, is death. The penitent has broken through all the webs of sophistry which the cunning intellect spins to hide from the fallen spirit the reality of its guilt and its doom. The dreary philosophy which includes sin as a part of God's arrangement of the universe, merely the necessary relief and foil of goodness, the night as the back-ground of the day—destroying man's responsibility, and making God unrighteous who taketh vengeance—to him is a mere wilderness of words. He knows that there is a right and a wrong, wide as the poles asunder. "There was no confusion," he says, "in my

mind about them, there was that within me which testified what was of God and what was of the devil; I saw the right, I knew that it was right; a spirit within me said, 'Choose the right and it shall be well with thee,' and *I* chose the wrong. Again, again, again, in spite of the light of God, in spite of the Spirit of God, in spite of my own convictions, and in the face of my knowledge of the end, I have said to evil, 'be thou my God,' to sin, 'be thou my delight,' to the world, 'be thou my bride.' *I have perverted that which was right.* *I*, in the full exercise of the freedom of my manhood, have done it, and *I* must bear the burden and meet the doom. I dare not say that God tempted me to evil, I dare not say that the devil forced me. *I* have done it. I have made evil a part of my being, I have taken its virus into the springs of my action, I have brought its taint into the currents of my blood, its cloud over the brightness of my life, and *I* have to bear it, if there be no deliverance, while my being endures. Schoolmen, cease your wearisome chatter about freedom and necessity, about the sense of sin being the mere hypochondria of the soul; I have it here within me, and I know too well its realness. Every statement which God makes finds emphatic echo within my being. I have a serpent within me, I have a weight upon me, which I—for of all beings in God's universe, my sin belongs to me alone—

must bear for ever, unless, and can there be any hope of it, I can be renewed in life's innermost springs."

"And this my sin has profited me not." It is inevitable that it should be so. Sin is a battle against the living Maker and Lord of the Universe; what profit can that struggle bring? "*He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength: who hath hardened himself against Him, and hath prospered? Which removeth the mountains and they know not: which overturneth them in His anger. Which shaketh the earth out of her place, and the pillars thereof tremble. Which commandeth the sun, and it riseth not; and sealeth up the stars. Which alone spreadeth out the heavens, and treadeth upon the waves of the sea. Which maketh Arcturus, Orion, and Pleiades, and the chambers of the south. Which doeth great things past finding out; yea, and wonders without number. Lo, He goeth by me, and I see Him not: He passeth on also, but I perceive Him not. Behold He taketh away, who can hinder Him? who will say unto Him, What doest thou?"* If sin in the long run can profit a soul—if it can fill it with peace and joy, and inspire it with courage and hope—if it can make the soul honour its service and covet its wage—then the righteous Lord hath ceased to rule the universe, the dark power has conquered, the reign of night and chaos is restored. "But I cannot," cries the peni-

tent, "make this confession. I know not the sinner who can make it. My confession is, that *'it profited me not.'* I look back upon the past with shame and horror, and I am drinking the dregs of the cup of its pleasure in bitterness of soul. It is all unmingled shame and misery ; I have learnt now, what God told me at the first, *'The wages of sin is death.'* *'In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.'* And I am dead, if there be no quickening of spirits ; I am lost, if there be no redemption of the slave. *'Is there no balm in Gilead? is there no physician there?'* *'Can the leopard change his spots, and the Ethiopian his skin?'* Is the disease remediless, is the captivity hopeless, is the death eternal?"

"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord : though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow ; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked ; but that the wicked turn from his way and live : turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways ; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?" "He looketh upon men, and if any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not ; He will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light. Lo, all these things worketh God oftentimes with man, to bring back his soul from

the pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living."

Having set forth the penitent's creed, I now come to speak of

II. The penitent's confession.

"If any man *say*, I have sinned." This implies, at any rate, that if any man should think it and not say it, he must miss the promised fruit.

Let us look a little more closely at the subject of confession—the saying to God, "*I have sinned.*" The Bible represents this as essential to complete forgiveness; on what ground of reason does this necessity rest? If a man is convinced, is not that sufficient? If he knows in his own soul that he has been a fool or a beast, and says it to himself, with that emphasis with which a man can talk to himself of himself on fit occasions, is not that enough? No! it is not enough; for reasons some of which at any rate I will try to set forth. I am the more anxious to do this because I think that the duty of confession is often grounded on a very false or very insufficient basis. And first, as to the need of confession generally. Something like this is often urged in depreciation of it. "The mere act of confession cannot be material; if the reality is in the heart, God sees it, and reality is all He cares for; He wants to see sorrow and shame for sin, and if that be there, what to Him are words?"

Precisely what they are to your fatherly heart, when you are seeking to soften and reclaim a wayward, sinful child. Search into the reason why you demand confession, before you condemn the demand of God. You may feel perfectly well assured that a child has found out the misery of sin, that in his own heart he condemns the transgression, and would give anything to recall it—that he is quite despondent and wretched through the discord which his sin has generated between himself and those whom he loves, but until he has said it, you feel that peace can only be half restored; you may be very deeply thankful to see the traces of penitence in his spirit, to be sure that he has condemned the sin, and gibbeted it in his heart; and yet, if he still refuses to confess it, to say, “*Father, I have sinned,*” you feel that the penitence is essentially imperfect, that there is still a cloud between your spirit and his spirit, and the breach in the home is still unhealed. What is the ground of this? The right answer may help us to understand why confession is exacted by God. Is the ground of your demand the fact that your honour has been insulted, and needs to be vindicated by a formal reparation; that your dignity has been lowered, and needs, like a national flag, to be publicly saluted before it consents to be appeased? I venture to hope that there would be something greater in your heart than the

sentiment of honour, which is honourable only when it is the outwork of deeper things ; and that the breach in such a case would not seem to you one which brought into question formal apologies and reparations. Does not the father's demand for confession spring rather out of the conviction that the penitence is imperfect which does not feel itself moved to confession spontaneously ? If a child is miserable because of some transgression against the parent, and yet hides that misery from the parent's eye, and holds back that confession which would be a balm to the parent's heart, it means distinctly that there is still an alienation—that the child's heart is not perfect towards the parent—and that there is a selfish isolation of himself from the heart of the parent and the communion of the home, which in itself is a sin against the father's love. The child in that case does not yet see the true sin, the failure of filial duty ; he has not yet sorrowed over the deepest cause of sorrow, the wounding a parent's heart. It is a sign that he does not yet long, or will not let the longing have way, for the true reconciliation, the true peace—the laying his aching head and burying his tear-stained cheek on the parent's bosom, and drinking in at every pore the assurance of restored confidence and love. I venture to think that this, and not the mere sentiment of dignity and honour, is the reason why a

parent waits for confession, and must hear the "Father, I have sinned," and clasp the penitent child to his heart, before he can feel that peace has been perfectly restored.

Let your own hearts interpret for you the ways of God.

He demands confession:—"The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."

Why? Some answer, that sin is a dishonour, a public dishonour to His government; confession is the only public reparation which can be offered for the fault; that He is a Ruler having public interests in charge, and, for the sake of those public interests, is bound to demand that the sinner shall make public confession, and thus do formal homage to the government whose laws he has formally spurned. If God is to be conceived of, in His relation to men, fundamentally as a Ruler, if that is the truest account which is to be given of the matter, there is no objection to be made to the statement. The Ruler, for the sake of the whole realm, righteously compels the rebellious subject to recant and swear

allegiance, before he can be forgiven. But I do not read in the records of the life of Christ, especially in that Gospel which gives the fullest record of His interior life, and His own sense of His mission, that He came to reveal the Ruler. I read in almost every page that He came to reveal the Father unto men. In other works, and especially in a recent book, entitled "*The Divine Mystery of Peace*," I have gone into this subject at length. It is answered by not unfriendly critics, that it is quite true that God is the Father, and there has, perhaps, been an undue suppression of the Fatherly element in His nature and relations, in our accepted theology; but then He is also a Ruler, and sustains relations which attach purely to the Ruler, to man, and to mankind. I confess that I cannot understand this variety in God. God is one. If He is a Father and also a Ruler, one must be the root of the other, He cannot be in part both. His rule must run through His fatherhood, and His fatherhood through His rule; and which is the root element of the twain no intelligent student of the Gospels can be left to doubt. A Ruler He is, unquestionably, with all a ruler's rights and claims. What father is he who does not rule in his home? But a Fatherly Ruler, because essentially a Father; all whose acts have their full explanation only in the relation between a father's spirit and a child.

A father's rule can miss none of the ends which pure rule can righteously contemplate, but it wins them in winning what is yet more precious, the ends which a father may contemplate in the education of a child.

It appears to me that God's reason for demanding confession may be stated on this two-fold ground :—

1. Confession alone makes the penitence complete.
2. Confession alone re-establishes that filial relation, without which the penitence can have no lasting fruits.

1. Confession completes the penitence. It is in truth the first instinct of a truly filial heart. No sense of sin has reached its utmost depth, until wronging a father, wounding his heart, grieving his love, is felt to be the blackest feature of it. Laws are but abstractions until we realize that they are uttered by a lawgiver ; and until we feel that we have sinned against a Being, we talk about violated laws in vain. A true penitence for sin against a Being, inevitably leads us to that Being ; his forgiveness, the restoration of his confidence and love, are the essential conditions of our peace. The real root-sin of our nature is the loss of the filial love and trust in God. While the soul stands far off from Him, bitterly conscious of sin, but resolved, " I will repent, but I will not confess," the very core of the sin is there. All that is repented

of fails to touch the real root of the transgression. The poison is in the wound still, and will frustrate all the cure. The rancour of the soul, which is the real venom of the wound, God seeks to expurge; and that never passes out until the penitent, hungry, footsore, tear-stained, travel-worn, falls blessedly on his Father's bosom, and cries, "*Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and I am no more worthy to be called thy son;*" and then, and then only, can the joyous cry be heard, "*Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.*"

2. Confession re-establishes the filial relation, which alone can give to penitence its perfect fruit.

The father not only wishes to know that his child has come to his right mind, and that he sees both the commandment and his own transgression in the clear daylight of truth, but he wishes to have him home again, near his side, under his eye and hand, that he may watch and tend him, train and teach him, uphold him against the temptations which once mastered him, and make his repentance a repentance unto life. A sense of right in common is not a sufficient bond of communion between two beings who are brought into relations, unless it

be cemented by warm and living bands of love. Spirits do not need only to see eye to eye, they need to beat heart to heart; till that is possible, their concord is not perfect, they may talk of peace, but there is nothing of that peace which is known as the peace of God. That is essentially personal. It is not the setting a soul square with righteousness; this it includes, but it is essentially the setting a heart right with God. Hence confession, which is the restoration of a personal union, is essential to it. Let that be withheld, the father's heart is unsatisfied, the child's heart is unsoothed, the home is closed, the songs are still. The restoration of the child to the father's heart is the only complete restoration; this alone is the guarantee of future peace. Let the barrier which the sullen heart persists in holding against the Lord once be broken, let the inward shame and sorrow burst forth in the confession—"Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest,"—and the peace becomes perfect

and blessed. There is great joy in that home, as there was great joy in that city to which the Gospel came; and the song rings out and infects the air with its gladness:—" *It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.*" Thus the demand for confession, like all Divine commands, has its root in the deep love of the Father of Spirits for even His prodigal children, and His resolve that their restoration shall be a complete restoration to peace and to Himself. This leads me to speak, in the third place, of

III. The fruits of confession through the abounding mercy and love of God.

" *He will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light.*" " *God will deliver;*" and the way of deliverance is here not dimly set forth. (Read Job xxxiii. 14—26.) I am not about to discuss the intricate questions which concern the doctrinal bearings of particular passages of the book of Job. To my mind, not in one passage only, but in many of the most profound passages of the book, the great idea of mediation is very plainly unfolded; and, as I have before said, the conditions of effectual mediation are very explicitly set forth. But, in truth, every promise of God in the Old Testament is built on the facts which are developed in the New. From first to

last it is God in Christ, "reconciling the world unto Himself, having made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." It is God in Christ who treats with man every when and every where. It is on the basis of the atonement which was completed on Calvary, that God meets with man and pleads with him in the promise:—"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." The atonement is the reason, the promise is its fruit. Strike out that history—the history of the passion of the Incarnate Word—and there is no meeting-point of man and God. There is then no reason in forgiveness, no right. God could not pronounce it; man could not believe in it; Heaven could not rejoice over it:—"But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbear-

ance of God ; to declare, I say, at this time, His righteousness : that He might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." There is the one absolute basis on which justification rests. But in this passage, and throughout the Old Testament generally, we have less the way set forth, explaining the grounds of the Divine action, than the end, as concerns man—forgiveness, reconciliation, and peace.

The fruits here set forth are two-fold. He will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light.

1. The pit. It is a word at which some laugh, but at which others, who know what sin means, shudder. Some treat it as a mere bugbear, with which theologians frighten the foolish ; to others, it is the horror of horrors, the grave of a living soul. The pit ! Have you ever looked boldly into your own soul when the devil has been holding high festival there ; after a mad revel, a foul wrong, a dark crime, or those more subtle and deadly sins of the spirit—a frenzy of hate, envy, or revenge ? Is there anything blacker in the universe than that looks ? There is a pit there deep enough, dark enough, to bury a soul's volition, a soul's love, a soul's joy, a soul's hope, for ever from the light of day. Have you ever shuddered at the thought of sinking into the pit of your own sin, the slime

of your own impurity ; and stifling there for ever ? Has the vision of remaining as you are at your worst, ever appalled you—your worst passions, your worst vices, rampant, raging, with no hope of taming them, no hope of even a gleam of a brighter world, a better life, for ever and ever ? If that vision has ever crossed you, I need not talk to you about the horrors of the pit. Some of you may never have known it. But have you never looked into a face which but masked a pit of foulness and wretchedness ; the presentment of a spirit whose every diviner power and passion had been wrested to the uses, prostituted to the pleasures of sin—a soul whose love was all dead, whose light was all dark, whose joy was all quenched in the languor of satiety, whose hope was all buried in the murky midnight of despair—a man who has lived his life of crime or pleasure at a desperate pace, and who has come quickly to the goal of mental, moral, and spiritual death—in the early morning of an eternal existence, a bankrupt ; stripped, beggared, *blasé* ; whining for death, for there is nothing to live for ; whining at death, for there is nothing to die for. Horror of horrors ! What is that awful shuddering gloom into which the soul is plunged when the thread of a wasted life is severed, and it drops out of the homes of the living into—the pit ?

I have seen such faces, and need none to explain to me these words. Picture Judas in the moment when the agony of life had become intolerable. Picture to yourselves his face as he stands there, the cord tightening about his neck, quivering on the edge of eternity, dropping down into his own place—the pit. “Hear, ye despisers, and tremble,” “lest ye also come into that place of torment.” But God can deliver:—“*He looketh upon men, and if any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not; He will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light.*” The confession of penitence in the uttermost extremity of guilt and sorrow, if any of you have reached it, shows that the pulses of the child’s heart are not yet dead within. The Father, taking His penitent to His bosom, even in that extremity, can quicken, renew, and save. A new heart He can give, a new life—the soul made anew after the image of the Saviour, to be born at length, through all the anguish and travail of the present discipline, glorious in His likeness, into the sunlight of the eternal world. For—

2. “*His life shall see the light.*” The light in which it was born to live, the light of the face of God. Light—the light of God—is to life what *sun-warmth* is to *flowers*. It draws forth their

beauty and fragrance; it clothes them with their dress of glory. No fairer image is there of the joy, the bliss, the glory of a soul new born with a life which is one with Christ's; one with all that is living, beautiful, blessed, victorious, radiant, in the universe; conscious now that it has in itself, through Christ, not a pit of horrible darkness, but a fountain of living, exhaustless force—a power to be, a power to be good, a power to be blessed, for ever and ever. From the very verge of the pit of darkness, where itself and all its hope were well-nigh buried, it springs as to heaven's gate, and sings pæans with the angels, "*Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever.*" It is the everlasting song. The soul caught the first note when the word, "*Father, I have sinned,*" was faltering on its stammering tongue. Its life is thenceforth a battle-march; a hymn of victory, whose theme is the redeeming love and power of the Lamb. The world of light is its home, of which nor death, nor hell, can rob it; and there—and 'tis but a filmy veil between—"they need no candle, neither light of the sun, for the Lord God giveth them light, and the days of their mourning are ended."

Who, then, will cast aside his rags, fling down his husks, and cry, "*Father, I have sinned against*

heaven and in thy sight, and I am no more worthy to be called thy Son." Who will burst now from the bondage of death and escape into the realm of the light for ever? Ho! ye that have lien among the pots, who have wallowed in the dust and filth of the sty of sin, come forth! come forth! into the sunlight of the love of God. Touched, kindled, by that golden glory, your life shall soar and shine, as a "dove whose wings are of silver and her feathers of yellow gold." Your life shall see the light. A glory shall gild its path, even through this weary wilderness of discipline. The light shall shine with more radiant splendour, as your pathway nears the bourne of immortality. With the step and the shout of the victor you shall pass the portal, and all the glory of the heavenly light shall burst upon your sight.

"The world recedes : it disappears :
Heaven opens on mine eyes, my ears
With sounds seraphic ring !
Lend, lend your wings ; I mount, I fly ;
O grave, where is thy victory ?
O death, where is thy sting ?"





Sermon VII.

She loved much: She had much forgiven.

“And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, and stood at His feet behind Him weeping, and began to wash His feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed His feet, and anointed them with the ointment. . . . Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much. . . . And He said unto the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.”—LUKE vii. 37, 38, 47, 50.

THIS banquet of the Pharisee occupied, probably, a later portion of the day on which our Lord had delivered one of His most remarkable and impressive discourses. His

theme had been John the Baptist—a prophet hated of the Pharisees, but dear to the people. John had been emphatically, like all his predecessors, the prophet of the people. The poor hear ever gladly such truth as rolled in thunder from his lips. They were worn down by legal exactions, and sick of Pharisaic cant and lies. They thronged to the ministry of a man who dealt a common judgment and a common measure of truth to all. The intense and fearless energy of this preacher of righteousness stirred their deeper passions; while his fierce denunciation of their taskmasters and tyrants kindled a hope of relief from their burdens. It made life more tolerable. Some ray of joy shone in their sad hearts at the thought that the kingdom of God was so near.

John came as a Reformer. All great Reformers are greeted at first with the popular sympathy and support. Doctrines of righteousness cannot but strike powerfully on the side of the oppressed and down-trodden classes, who feel themselves depressed below their natural level by the unrighteousness of their lords. There is always too much that palpably needs reform in this sad world, for reform to be other than a popular cry with those whose lot exposes them, unarmed, to the assault of “outrageous fortune.” Any man who will stand up and preach righteousness in God’s name, and with

divine boldness, shall have throngs of the poor of this world round him, applauding to the echo, until they find that the reformation which he preaches must have its beginning in their own hearts. Then the love of many waxes cold. But John bore the convictions and the sympathies of the multitude with him through his brief but impetuous career. The hate and antagonism of the Pharisees, whom they hated, his ascetic life, his intense zeal, his fearless utterance, his early doom, kindled their imaginations, and touched their hearts. So jealously did the people cherish his memory, that the rulers might more safely have wrought any moral abomination in Jerusalem than have whispered a doubt of his prophetic ministry. "The rulers feared the people, because that all men held John to be a prophet."

The Lord had spoken of this great forerunner, his vigorous independence, his prophetic grandeur, before which even the ministry of Elijah paled ; and then He enlarged His discourse, He spake of that kingdom of heaven of which John had been the herald, its winning aspect, its inclusive spirit, its genial breadth of sympathy and love, the daring eagerness with which all men pressed into it, the contrast which at every point it presented to the rigid and strait-laced exclusions of the law, and as He spake "*all the people that heard Him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the*

baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him." Supplying from Matthew xi. Luke's omissions, we find that this sketch of the essential character of the kingdom of heaven, led on to some awful denunciations of those by whom its benign ministry was scorned.—Matt. xi. 21—23. Lifting His thoughts from thence, He uttered some calm deep words about the Father—whom then, for the first time in His public ministry, He thus addressed—the mystery of His nature, unfathomable by human wisdom, the inscrutable secrets of His government, the dread abyss of God, which He, the only begotten Son, alone fathomed and filled. He reminded them of the tremendous sanctions with which His words were attended, how even the lightest had on it the absolute emphasis of God. Then, lest words so awful, thoughts so profound, should chill and oppress their spirits, His heart poured forth, from a depth of tenderness unfathomed still, that most tender, pathetic, and soul-piercing appeal of the Man of sorrows to the children of sorrows, which perhaps is without peer even among "the words of the Lord Jesus :"—"*Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me ; for I am meek and lowly in heart : and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and*

my burden is light." I have directed your thought to this discourse in its wholeness, because these last words seem to furnish the key to this most touching and pregnant narrative which succeeds:—"And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, and stood at His feet behind Him weeping, and began to wash His feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed His feet, and anointed them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee which had bidden Him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner. And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he to whom he forgave most. And He said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged. And He turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the

hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss : but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint : but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven ; for she loved much : but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. And He said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven. And they that sat at meat with Him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also ? And He said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee ; go in peace." I beg my readers to study this carefully. It is evident that our Lord's discourse had been listened to by multitudes. Among them, a woman that was a sinner had heard His words about the Father and the kingdom of heaven ; she was apparently heart-sick of her vocation, perhaps, heart-sick of her very life. Righteousness was a thing she dared not think of. Had she been bred in a righteous home ? Did wandering memories throng thickly when these things of man's higher life rose up before her sight ? Perhaps the denunciation of God's vengeance on the despisers of the Saviour had shaken her soul from its guilty slumbers. The prayer of Jesus to the Father, this communion of a brother man with the Lord of all, had opened the vision of heaven above her. Ah ! might she but look up and see a Father smiling,

where she dreaded to find only a flaming sword. Then the tender pathetic appeal, into which the Saviour's communion with the Father glided, completed the conquest of her nature. Hope flashed its light into her spirit. Life had now some worth to her. It was worth while even to battle with this tyrannous evil, for there was born within her a hope that it might be forgiven and conquered. When the crowd broke up, she marked that Simon had bidden the Saviour to the banquet. These ostentatious entertainments admitted the poor to behold their splendour, and to gather the crumbs from the loaded board. After a while, clasping something hidden in her bosom, she glided in among the guests; kneeling in the shadow of His couch, and grasping the precious casket, on which, perhaps, she had spent all her living, and which, with love's sure instinct, she had provided against this need, she looked eagerly on the scene. We can imagine how she would drink in the music of the voice of the Saviour, and feel that the breath of His presence stirred the torpid faculties of her spirit, and quickened the numbed affections of her heart. Silently she watched what *men* would do to this matchless teacher, how they would distinguish with their honours Him whose tones had poured new life into the poor sinner's bruised and bleeding heart. Scorn and indignation struggled in a bosom

already bursting with emotion, when she saw that they wilfully dishonoured Him. Rising at length with the dignity of reverence and the beauty of love, her pent-up passion burst forth in a flood of uncontrollable weeping. Then she broke the box which she had borne in her bosom, and shed on Him its odour like incense. Bathing His feet with her tears, and wiping them with her silken hair, she wrote this lasting record—to the confusion of the mocking guests, and the eternal shame of their host—thus the outcasts of earth can greet the Lord, who left His throne and the bliss of the Father's bosom to save them, to wipe the tears of broken-hearted mourners, lighten the darkness of hope-abandoned prodigals, and break the yoke, though He himself should die in the effort, by which Satan's captives were being led down into the deepest depths of hell.

In treating this subject more fully I shall try to analyse

I. The secret springs of the poor sinner's conduct.

II. The nature of the action, which was viewed so diversely by the Pharisees and the Lord.

I. The springs of the woman's conduct.

The woman was "a sinner." Into the precise form or extent of her transgression there is no need to pry. The word was very significant; a "lost

woman" would be its equivalent now. The sin was one which filled her whole consciousness. There was no chance of her forgetting it, poor outcast! known, shunned, hated, by man, and—men told her too, the priests and doctors of her day—by the angels, and by God.

The springs of her action, perhaps, lie here.

1. In her desperate self-abandonment the Lord had lit one ray of hope within her spirit. "*Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*" What sin-crushed spirit would not leap to hear such words from such divine lips? Despair is the devil's own instrument. The first step in the reformation of the most abandoned profligates is to get them to care for themselves—to think themselves worth the care. How many men are there who, heart-sick of sin, loathing it in their better moments with an intensity which no Pharisee can measure, yet practise it recklessly day by day. Why? Because they see nothing beyond; and nothing in themselves worth saving for a higher destiny. Black clouds close their future; or if they lift they grow lurid. "What, then, is the use of struggling?" they cry; "Fate is against us, to sin is our destiny, and the punishment of sin is our doom. If we break the chain—what then? What is there for us to do, to be, or to become, beyond?" And so the habit, though hated, tyrannizes. There is

no strength in the springs of action, because no hope. They feel themselves contemptible and loathly ; and they make up their minds, seeing no better within their reach, to drag about with them the dead carcase of their sin—many with a half-conscious notion that what they suffer may help to atone. He speaks the word of life to them who first makes them feel that they have a future, that there is a soul within them still which God cares for, searches after, and at any cost of suffering would save. And when this thought first flashes its ray of hope into the spirit, the loathings and the longings which the poor sinner had long been crushing, start up with a new and terrible vitality. “ Men, you have wronged me, poor outcast that I am, trampling me on your dunghills among your rubbish and offal, as a thing too far gone, too tainted to the core, to live again a human life. I know now that I am a spirit still. God tells me that there is that within me which is worth Redemption. I arise at His call and go forth, though a baptism of tears and blood be before me, to meet a spirit’s destiny.”

Doubtless, this poor sinner had long loathed her vocation. Doubtless, the burning blush of shame had often stained her cheek, and tears, tears that had a tinge of blood in them, had often dimmed her eye, when she remembered that she had lost *her womanhood*, lost her soul, lost her life, for ever.

Surely, too, the thought of reformation had often visited her. But the "Where shall I go? what shall I do?" as often checked her. "Who in this universe cares for a woman that is a sinner? Shall I ask the Pharisee to help me? He will but gather his garments closer lest I should touch him. My parents? They have shut the door of their homes and their hearts in my face. The God of my people is a God whose holiness burns like fire, and I belong to the darkness and the night. The darkness is my home, and misery is my portion. Shame and everlasting contempt the harvest of my future." Oh! what a heaven-born ray of hope was lit within the darkness of her spirit; what a gleam flashed forth from that jewel, which, though dimmed and flawed, was within her still, when the Man who was fresh from the shrine of immaculate purity, and was bathed in its holy lustre, bent on that woman who was a sinner a glance of ineffable tenderness, and said, "*Come unto me, thou weary and heavy laden one, and I will give thee rest.*" "*Woman, thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.*"

2. The Lord had quickened within her numbed and withered heart the pulses of a blessed and purifying love.

Love is the strong redeemer of pollution. How hard and how long will even a human love struggle against the pollution of a sensual life. Even from

the depths of shame, love can lift the soul to the light again, and almost to heaven. The Devil has not fairly secured his victim, until the very embers of love are extinguished in the hearth-fire of the heart. In the lowest and basest class of society, that which preys on every other class, the foulest vices and the darkest crimes have just one feature which redeems them from being hellish, and that is the unselfish love, which sometimes burns with a strange purity, on the altar of the corruptest heart.

This woman was a sinner. Love was dead within her. Frowned on by all, she had learnt only to hate. The blessedness of loving was a memory of the past. She had known it once, but a great gulf had opened between her and that happy time. She could recall it only as Eve remembered Eden : dimly, as through tears, and from afar. It was long since the pulses of pleasure had been quickened by any thing more holy than the sullen heat of passion, or the dull fury of revenge. Jesus made her a woman again. The tendrils of love, torn from their pristine hold, all tangled and rotting on the damp earth whereon she grovelled, began to tingle and thrill again. As a mother joys to hear the first faint cry of her little one, she joyed to feel the first faint throbbing of the pulses of a pure and heavenly love. "*Come*

unto me," said a Being full of life and of wisdom, a Being of celestial goodness, holiness, and truth. She felt, lost as she was, that she could love that Man of Sorrows ; she felt that the cords of love and the bands of a man, were drawing the poor outcast of earth to his heart. Heaven seemed to open above her and beam its benediction. Earth smiled around her, all things dressed themselves in new beauty, the very air was glad, when the first glow of love breathed through her spirit. Her sin was still there. She needed none to remind her of it. Never had she felt so intensely as at that moment the blackness of her transgression. Never—else what mean those blinding tears?—had the anguish of contrition so preyed upon her heart. But love was there—love, celestial spirit—and some sure instinct told her that the celestial spirit must conquer in every strife. The Lord had brought her out of the depths, and set her upon a rock. A few brief words, and the vision of a human countenance, had made a complete revolution in her life ; out of hell itself it had brought her up, and set her before the gate of heaven ; where, with all the white-robed throng, she is singing, “Unto Him who hath loved me, and washed me from my sins in His own blood, and hath made me a king and priest unto God and His Father, unto Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.”

II. And now let us turn our thoughts to the nature of the action, and analyse the opposing judgments which were passed on it by the disciples and the Lord. Worldly wisdom would probably find a double objection to this transaction.

1. It was shameful that a woman, who was a sinner, should approach a prophet ; and

2. *The gift was lavish and wasteful, and might have been put to a better use.

It is impossible not to compare with this another but a very kindred transaction, which is recorded by Saint John. (Read John xii. 1—8.) From these two passages we may fairly gather what may be urged by worldly wisdom against such a ministry of love. Instead of answering these objections in detail, it appears to me more helpful to set forth some of the principles which seem to be involved in the answers of the Lord. And Jesus seems to me to say by His answers,

1. That love—such love—must be left to its native affinities. Its elections are absolute, its decisions are supreme.

No doubt the woman who was a sinner and the rich Pharisee's house were in strange association. Sympathy between them there could be none. But if a sinner should be drawn by the spells of a heavenly love even to a rich Pharisee's presence, the Lord says that that presence would be less

contaminated by the sinner, than it would be blessed and honoured by the love. That a sinner should venture within the sphere of a prophet's sanctity was still more strange to Simon. All unknown to him the doctrine unfolded in these pregnant words. (Read Luke xv. 1—10.) Unknown to him that his guest had stooped from a glorious heavenly throne, and put off its crown, that sinners who had known Him only as the God of righteousness, and had trembled, might rejoice in Him as the God of mercy, and repay the sacrifice by love. Simon knew not that heavenly love, though born in that corrupted bosom, was a spirit more strong and celestial than the spirit of a Pharisee's righteousness. He knew as little that for love, yea, the love of the prodigal children, the Saviour's spirit had yearned even on His throne of glory. The love of a Father for prodigal children is a hard thought to a Pharisee's understanding, and a strange sensation to a Pharisee's heart. But the Lord knew that His sacrifice and suffering had not been fruitless, when love's strong instincts had guided a woman who was a sinner to weep out the stains of her pollution at His footstool, and draw new life by that potent talisman out of His sympathetic heart. Simon saw there but the abandoned woman, with all the stains of her guilt upon her, whose very love would contaminate the purity of his home, and

the reputation of his guest ; the Lord Jesus saw the saint, whom His grace had bound with surer than adamantine bands to His heart for ever—saved by His word from eternal perdition, to shine as a star in the kingdom of His Father, and shed, not tears, but beams of love on His radiant home, radiant with joy like hers, through eternity.

2. The Lord said that there are gifts which a love like hers alone can justify.

“She loved much,” He pleaded, in answer to the glances which condemned the occasion as a scandal, and the gift as a waste. There are gifts which we measure, and are bound to measure, by the need of the recipient. Them let the strictest prudence gauge and limit, lest a puny nature become surfeited with a bounty, which in such case may be wanton, and even a sin

There are gifts which are simply the utterance of the heart of the giver, outlets of surcharged feeling, expressions of thoughts too deep for words, for tears. Let the cold and cautious stand aside while such are passing, nor stay the flight of these angels on the wing. The heart’s first duty is to find itself expression. She loved much ; she spent her living in telling how much she loved. Simon, there is a malignant devil in that cautious calculation. That spirit would weigh the sunlight, and moan that so much should be lost on the waste places of

the world. Nay, it would shut up, lest it should become bankrupt, the treasury of the love of God. She loved much, and she gave her all to show it. Perhaps it reminded the Saviour of another sacrifice, more lavish, more uncalculating still. A sacrifice wherein God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that the world through Him might not perish, but have everlasting life. Wherein, too, the Son gave all that enriched His being, and made His bliss, for the love of unworthy, unthankful man. Simon! measure the love of Christ by the same dull measures; it will stand forth as the very type of prodigality and wanton waste.

Moreover, love like hers is not so uncalculating, though it disdains Pharisaic measures. The woman gave her living, but she won her soul. The ointment was lost, and the money which bought it, but her soul was for ever rid of its burden, and was braced for conflict and heavenly work. Love, though profuse in gifts, clears the intellect, kindles the spirit, stirs the courage, and nerves the hands. Paul, when he had counted all things but loss for Christ, began in earnest his higher ministry to mankind. That woman, having wept out her contrition, and shed forth her love, stood prompt for duty—ready for nobler ministry to souls and bodies, than Simon with all his gold. She loved

much. She showed it lavishly. Let it pass, Simon! Her gift cannot reach the measure of her Saviour's. The world, no doubt, has lost its ointment, but God and heaven have gained a soul.

3. The Saviour says that love like hers may well seek strange and profuse expressions, for it is the parent of a glory and blessedness, which transcends all utterance and thought.

Love is life. The woman who was a sinner, loving much, grew more swiftly and strongly to saintly perfectness, than Simon the just Pharisee measuring and obeying. Love, like electric fire, leaps swiftly to its object. Justness, the quiet sense of duty, the careful measuring of obligations, travels slowly, though wisely and surely, along the road. (Read Luke vii. 47—50.) Perhaps a cautious prudence, a hesitation to commit himself by too pointed courtesies to the Saviour, is the worst that we can lay to the Pharisee's charge. But that sinner's passionate love had already outstripped him far. He was grovelling among his cautious calculations, she was already soaring upwards to heaven and to God. That glow of love in her heart was a nascent glory. That pulse of life which it had quickened within her could never be lost or killed. She went forth from the Saviour's presence already a saint in spirit; she is standing now before her Saviour's throne, a saint in glory and in bliss. It

was of the kindred deed of a kindred spirit that the Saviour declared, "*Wheresoever the Gospel shall be preached in the whole world : there shall also this that this woman hath done be told for a memorial of her.*" Art has selected this act as the very type of tenderness and devotion, and the angels cherish its memory, and celebrate it in their songs in heaven.

And now, "HOW MUCH OWEST THOU UNTO MY LORD?" "*She loved much : for she had much forgiven.*" Man ! woman ! how much lovest thou ? How much owest thou ? Life, intellect, friends, love, the broad creation, the splendour of the universe, all are there, freely poured forth by His bounty at thy feet. And shall I not say unto thee how thou owest unto Him thine own soul also ? Canst thou sum in full that debt ? A burden of guilt lifted which else had crushed thee ; a prison-house of Satan shattered which else had held thee a captive in eternal pain ; a grisly terror conquered, destroyed, which else had made thy life a spectre-haunted night ! And how much hast thou paid ? Hast thou paid even a word ? Hast thou even confessed His name ? Has He ever heard a word of public homage and honour from thy lips ? Is not the time come to have done with this trembling, calculating neutrality, and to fling yourself, like this poor sinner, with a flood of passionate tears at His feet.

"Now I am thine, for ever thine,
Nor shall my purpose move ;
Thy hand hath loosed my bonds of pain,
And bound me with thy love.
Here in thy courts I leave my vow,
And thy rich grace record;
Witness, ye saints, who hear me now,
If I forsake the Lord."

And then go on to fathom the deeper meanings of this woman's sacrifice. Understand what he meant, who said, "*I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live ; and the life that I live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.*" Her tears meant all that—her life we may be sure expressed it. "*Thy faith hath saved thee ; go in peace,*" dismissed her to a life which was no feeble or partial sacrifice. The words would have been no mockery on her lips,

"Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small,
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all."





Sermon VIII.

The Sin that hath never Forgiveness.

“Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?”—MATT. XXIII. 33.



THINK that the most awful word which has ever been written by a human pen is “the wrath of the Lamb.” The prelude to its out-pouring is here. Once only was that tender and merciful spirit stirred to vehement and scathing denunciation; and then it uttered the most terrible anathema which is on record in the Book of God. Of all wrath, the wrath of the Lamb must be the most awful, because the most hopeless. When He who would give the

best blood of His heart to save, rises up to judgment, Divine patience and hope are exhausted ; the glow which would have quickened, had a pulse been left to quicken, then burns but to destroy. The wrath of the Lamb ! Fear it not, trembler, fear it not ; it burns not for thee. For any who have the heart to tremble at it, it is not. The unpardonable sin ! Have no dread, you who shudder at the thought of it. It is not for any who can feel distress at sin. All sin hath forgiveness that knows itself to be sin, and trembles. No humbled fearful transgressor can ever wither under the wrath of Christ. It sounds like a paradox, but none who have the grace to fear need ever be fearful. Never until you begin to thank God that you are not as other men are, and to recite your catalogue of virtues as a pleasant lecture in the ear of heaven, need you begin to question about "*the sin that never hath forgiveness, neither in this world, nor in the world which is to come.*"

There is something here which always seems to me very terrible when I open this chapter. These words are doubly awful on the lips of the patient and forgiving Christ. He had lived among the throngs of sinners, the crippled, maimed, stained, and outcast, and He had nothing but words of gracious compassion and tenderness to speak to them. "*Come unto me, all ye that are weary and*

heavy laden, and I will give you rest," had been His cry. It had drawn the sinners of the *world* around Him, as though His pity had been magnetic, and many a poor prodigal and profligate had wept out their guilt and misery at His feet. But here were sinners—sinners of the Church—on whom He flashed the lightning of His indignation; whose portrait He draws with pitiless severity; whose sin He withers with a blighting anathema, the more startling because the publicans and harlots had been wondering throughout His ministry at the gracious words which ever fell from His lips. Like the tears of a strong proud man, like the calm of a high-spirited and passionate woman, like the complaint of a gentle and long-suffering heart, like the daring energy of meekness when dear ones are threatened, this outburst of the Saviour's righteous indignation is the more tremendous for its long and hard restraint; it rolls like a flood around the fortress of Pharisaic pride and insolence, whence the lords of God's heritage were wont to look down and to rain their scorn upon His poor; and it was not long before that flood had loosened its foundations, and tossing them on its angry surge, had swept them and their tyrannies on a full tide of vengeance to the pit.

Nor was the Lord the only witness for God's righteousness in that age who had thundered out

his anathema against the elders of the Jewish Church, and the masters of the Jewish state. John the Baptist had blazed into kindred indignation when he saw them mingling with the throng of the poor, the weary, the wretched, who came to hear God's message from his lips. God's righteousness the publicans and sinners could bear to hear of; it had even a gracious and compassionate tone on the lips of its preacher; it was like the touch of a cool soft hand on the fever of their aching hearts. But the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees they hated with intense vehemence; it tormented and maddened them. And their indignation found utterance from the lips of their great popular preacher. It was the wrong and misery of the poor, of souls bound in the prison, lost in the night, under the rule of these arrogant and insolent doctors of the kingdom, which lent such piercing point to the Baptist's denunciation, "*Ye generation of vipers, who hatb warned you to flee from the wrath to come?*"

It is not to be wondered at that men in every age have pored over these vehement anathemas, and agonized over the questions of personal responsibility which they force on the attention of mankind. "*The sin which never hatb forgiveness; neither in this world, nor in the world which is to come.*" The words lend a fearful reality to trans-

gression. They forbid us finally to dally with the Pantheist's dream of transgression as a devious path to a blessed end, the first stumbling step of an unending progress, the rude and tentative beginning of the fulfilment of the counsel of God about our lives. There is a sin which remains unconquerable, even by the love and pity of the Incarnate Word; which remains insoluble, even in the menstruum of the grace of Christ; and which defies every effort of the Redeemer to transfigure its hideous form, and make it, transformed, the attendant and minister of the eternal triumph of His cross. There is a sin which can draw down on a man, even from Divine lips, the sentence, "*It had been better for that man if he had never been born.*"

If anything can establish the reality, and reveal in all its naked deformity the sinfulness of sin, it is such a sentence as this. Responsibility is no dream of delirious souls; it is no bugbear of priests. It is the *man's* endowment; and Divine lips declare that he may so handle it as to cut himself off from the sphere of life, and bury himself in the pit of darkness, anguish, and despair, through eternity. It needed but this to reveal the essential horror of evil in the sight of the great Father, whose home it desolates, whose children it torments and destroys. And there were men then

in Jerusalem, there was a great school of priests and doctors in Jerusalem, who provoked the Saviour's righteous indignation and wrath to utter it; and to brand them with the only unmeasured anathema which ever fell from His patient and forgiving lips. It is most important that we should study the physiognomy and physiology of this deadliest of all transgressions, that we may see where and why the Divine treatment of sin stays its merciful and redeeming hand, withdraws its healing, purifying waters, and leaves the rock hard, bare, and defiant, to be beaten by the storms, and blasted by the ice-cold breath of the outer darkness for ever and ever.

I. We will endeavour to identify the spiritual condition on which this hateful epithet is branded by John the Baptist and by the Lord.

The term which the Lord here applies to the men whose vices and crimes He lashes with such unsparing sternness, is remarkable; the more so as it is used but thrice in the Gospels—once by John the Baptist, and twice by the Lord. In each case it is aimed expressly, by name, at the same class, and presents a vivid image of the same sin. This is surely a very important indication to guide us in determining what this unpardonable sin may be. It is the sin of these vipers, be they who they may. It is the subtle, malignant, numbing poison, dis-

tilled from fangs full of the fiend's own bitterness and hate, which is deadly to all hope, joy, and love, if by chance one gleam of them have lit the darkness or thrilled the deadness of poor sinners' hearts. It is the spirit which searches for love that it may wound it, for grace that it may poison it, for life that it may kill it, lest the world should live anew by grace, be comforted and cherished by love, and link itself on by hope to the bliss and the glory of heaven. It is the spirit which, seeing this love incarnate on its Divine errand, seeing the world's death-pallor tinged with the rosy glow, and the rigid limbs stirring under the currents of a new-born life, said straightway, "This is of the devil," and stung the Divine One—though it could not touch the fountain of His power, the love which drew Him from Heaven to Calvary—even unto death. Thrice by inspired lips the spirit which was incarnate in the Pharisaic school was branded as viperous. Read the passages, you will easily gather from them what it means. "*But when He saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to His baptism, He said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?*"—(Matt. iii. 7.) "*And, behold, there was a man which had his hand withered. And they asked Him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath days? that they might accuse Him. And He said unto them, What*

man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the Sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out? How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the Sabbath days. Then saith He to the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it forth; and it was restored whole, like as the other. Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against Him, how they might destroy Him. . . . Then was brought unto Him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and He healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw. And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the Son of David? But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils.”— (Matt. xii. 10—14, 22—24.) “But woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in. Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows’ houses, and for a pretence make long prayer; therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation. Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.”— (Matt. xxiii. 13—15.) The passage in Matt. iii.

does not explain itself, but it is valuable as affixing to the class which our Lord so vehemently denounces, the same terrible name. The Baptist saw there the same essential character, and branded it with the same epithet. What is it then? What is that viperous spirit in a human breast which God hates with utter hatred, which the merciful Saviour brands with damning anathemas, and which God, angels, and men, will cast out with horror and loathing from the holy homes which the Lord is preparing for those who were once the bondsmen of Satan and the prey of death—the homes of the new heaven and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness for evermore?

It is the spirit which hates, maligns, and seeks to paralyse, the ministry of God's love to men. Be sure it was no infirmity of flesh or spirit; no evil springing rankly out of man's sorrowful heritage of a passionate, lustful, and erring nature, which drew such withering words from those merciful lips. It was the spirit which was hating, wronging, binding, stinging, and tormenting the great mass of suffering sinners, the sick and dying ones all round, whom He came to heal and save. Only in the name of man—man wronged, outraged, stung to death, by these asps of malignant pride—could the Son of Man bring His lips to utter these tremendous words of doom. The men who were poisoning the very

well-springs of mercy with their devilish suggestions, who were crippling the healing hand of love with their tricks and subtleties of law, who were shutting the kingdom of heaven on the wretched who were thronging its portals, who were making it impossible, as far as their malignant will had sway, that God's poor dying world should be redeemed, heard surging around them, and sweeping them to perdition, this resistless flood of Divine indignation and scorn, "*Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how shall ye escape the damnation of hell?*"

This surely was one of the most startling and wonderful discourses ever delivered in this world. There were the elders of the Jewish Church, the acknowledged representatives and successors of the greatest name in history. They held unquestioned the supreme seats in the synagogues, they were the recognised interpreters and expositors of the Divine law and counsel to men. But there was a deep undercurrent of hatred towards them in the popular mind; the burdens which these men imposed in the Divine name were intolerable—life was weary, unutterably weary, under the conditions which they laid down. Still the people heard that they were God's expositors. "If life be so very intolerable," they might say to themselves, "why, it must be borne; God, it seems, will have it so; perhaps human misery is not so dreadful to

God: at any rate there is no help." And now imagine the thrill of amazement and half-conscious, half-repressed delight which would stir their dull hearts, when One who spake as never man spake, and whom they ever heard gladly because of the gracious words which fell from His lips, tore off the veil of this Pharisaic sanctity, and laid bare the foulness and rottenness which were behind—declared that these were not God's ministers, but the devil's, that these burdens were the devil's burdens, this yoke the devil's yoke, and these legal subtleties the devil's traps and snares for souls. It was *the* great revelation. The yoke was broken from that hour. Men were there, a poor tattered company of followers of this poor man's friend, who were training themselves to stand up before every court and tribunal of these tyrants of souls, and say, "Whether it be right in the sight of God, to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye; but we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." From that time God's good words have had a myriad independent organs of utterance in the world, and poor sinners have never been without friends. But a great battle had to be fought, a great agony had to be borne, before that day of deliverance should fully dawn for man. The Pharisees were arming for the conflict after their fashion, as well as the Lord. They had

settled firmly that this merciful voice should be silenced, that this healing hand should be crippled, that this loving heart should be pierced, and that the world should remain a prison-house, full to bursting of the sin and misery of the poor; and already they were beginning their hellish work: "*Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against Him, how they might destroy Him.*"—(Matt. xii. 14.) Mark the occasion. A man made whole on the Sabbath day—a great healing accomplished, a great burden lifted, a great joy poured into a sad, weary heart, a great ray of the love of God sent streaming into the darkness of the world. But a Pharisaic regulation had been broken. Perish the healing, perish the Healer, but let the rule of the Pharisees live! And so deadly was their determination that the Healer and the healing should perish, rather than that one jot or tittle of the Pharisaic law should fail, that from that hour they set themselves steadfastly to destroy Him. Do you wonder at the sequel? "*Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to*

come."—(Matt. xii. 31, 32.) "*Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?*"

In this chapter it is precisely the same. It is the wrongs and miseries of others, of hearts bruised under the heel of the Pharisees' insolence, and bleeding from the strokes of their rods, which stirs the Saviour's indignation. "*Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.*" There is the whole gist of it. Robbers and murderers of souls, infesting the broad highway of the kingdom of heaven with viperous malignity and craft, and frightening poor, trembling, crippled sinners from the gate—forbidding men to enter, when God's love had flung wide the entrance, and sent forth the summons, "*Come, for all things are now ready: and yet there is room*"—infecting the bread of life with their poison, and fouling all its springs, choking with scowls the songs of its children, and changing their prattling praises into sobs and wailing. I say again, wonder you at the sequel? Wonder you that these bitter wrongs and miseries of men stirred even the Son of Man to a Divine fury of indignation, which could only vent itself in the words, "*Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?*"

II. What lies at the root of this state of mind and spirit—whence does it spring?

Not from the perversities, infirmities, lusts, and vices which belong to the prodigal's character, and are unveiled in the prodigal's life. These have their own perils, chastisements, and miseries—filth, squalor, rags, pining hunger, bitter regrets. But not thus does the Saviour denounce them. The prodigal may wander too far, he may linger in the wilderness till his day is ended, but the Father follows him with His pity, and to the last yearns over him to recover him to Himself. We must turn to another, the Saviour's dear disciple and friend, to unravel the mystery of these terrible words. *"This then is the message which we have heard of Him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us."*—(1 John i. 5—10.) John speaks here very abso-

lutely, like the Master; and his words present a somewhat startling collocation of thought. Our first notion would perhaps be, that to walk in darkness and to be conscious of sin, must be about the same thing. Sin is darkness. To be conscious of sin is to be conscious of darkness. He who can say, "I have no sin," must surely be living in the light. Such would be our first thoughts. John says precisely the reverse. He tells us that to become conscious of sin is to get out into the light, that to remain unconscious of sin is to abide in the darkness, and that if we say that we have fellowship with Him while we are unconscious of sin, "we lie, and do not the truth."

And this is precisely what the Pharisees were saying. *"Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."*—(Luke xviii.

10—14.) They had settled in their own minds that they had fellowship with God. They had settled, equally clearly, that they were the holy ones of the world. They looked with a lofty contempt on the great mass of their fellow-men who did not know much about their divine relations, but who at any rate were sure that they were sinners. The Pharisees, quite sure that they had fellowship with God, and feeling bound to maintain the appearance of that fellowship, had to invent a God who could be pleased with such service. Thus they were groping in the densest moral darkness, their world was a world of mists and shadows, from which every reality which might give them a rude shock, and bring them to themselves, was jealously excluded. And this world of darkness, drear and ghastly, full of bloodless shadows of their own vanity and pride, they held forth as God's living world, His heavenly kingdom, to their perishing fellow-men. These, with the wholesome instinct of a real need, felt that this Pharisaic world was full of dreary mockeries and falsehood. But yet these men were in Moses' seat! Ah, if this horrible Hades of theirs be the real kingdom of heaven!

That man is in darkness who never brings himself forth into the living presence of the Most High, who never brings his thoughts, his aims, his principles, his works, to the test of some

higher and unfailing standard, even the standard of the Divine righteousness and truth. He knows no higher than himself, and a world like himself. He may be a pompous and even a famous professor, but he is dark, dark, dark; he is his own god, and his only prayer is "with himself." But if a man will come to the light, will come with simple and earnest heart to God, to be judged, the first thing which he discovers is his sin. It is light which reveals darkness. It is when a man comes into the sphere of the Life and the Light, that he feels the deadness and darkness of his own poor heart. "*Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord,*" is the first cry of a soul coming forth into the daylight; which melts into the prayer, "*God be merciful to me a sinner.*" Then a blessed sense of communion with brother-men around him springs up within his heart. He has found what is common to man; common sin, common need of salvation from sin. "We cannot scorn each other, brother; we cannot spurn each other; we will not torment each other; there is one enemy who is tormenting both of us. We can weep together, brother; we can pray together, we shall be saved together, and we shall live together, saved in heaven." Then the true fellowship begins, when souls are out of the darkness, in the light of God's grace and love. Then, "*If we walk in the*

light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin."

The darkness isolates. The Pharisee is alone. He has never found the common term, "*Father, I have sinned,*" wherein the human brotherhood subsists. "God, I thank thee that I am not as these men," is the only recognition of them which he vouchsafes. The habit of saying, "I am holier than thou," the habit of comparing ourselves with those whom we may choose to brand as sinners, instead of with God, before whom we should find ourselves wholesomely on their level, easily hardens into a conviction of this kind, "I am of superior order, I am what these men never can be, my class is the elect band of the great human company, the rest are the dross to my gold, the chaff to my corn; the great assay of life but assures my privilege, and sweeps the mass with undistinguishing carelessness away." This is the Brahmun, the twice-born man of India; this is the Pharisee, the instructed man, the man separate by his knowledge of God and of the law, among the Jews. I will not follow him to England. Search and look, brethren; he is among us, as arrogant, lofty, and exclusive as ever; as spiteful to the morally sickly, maimed, and poor. The next step is an easy one. Men feeling that they are a class, a caste, of higher privilege

than their fellowmen, and of loftier destiny—the legitimate heirs of the kingdom, while the mass are but hewers of wood and drawers of water at the best—soon come to regard their pretensions and expectations as property, as precious possession, which any man who speaks to the poor in the common human tones, about the matters which are their peculiar charge, threatens to destroy. In fact, it is an infringement of their monopoly, to bring down the Divine fire through any other channels, or conduct it to any meaner souls. And the penalty of the infringement is inevitably death. The man who recognises a common human nature, a common human need, and a common God and Father to supply it, is the only devil they know or believe in, and on him they concentrate all their malignant fury, to cast him out of their synagogues and to hunt him to death. If godliness be a life in the soul of which every man is capable, if God's grace and love be the bread of the soul, for which every man pines, and which can nourish every man unto life everlasting, then this Pharisaism must be a horrible mistake. "Away with such a doctrine from the earth," they cry; "'Have any of the rulers and the Pharisees believed in it?' If the man will not be silenced, strangle him, stone him, crucify him; away with him, away with him; he hath a devil, send him to his own place." The intense, the

frightful selfishness which grows up in the heart of the man who, walking in darkness and saying, "I have no sin," gives thanks to God that he is not as other men are, is, when we see it on the scale of a sect or school, one of the darkest things in the dark chamber of history.

The fury which seizes on an elect class, proud of their spiritual pre-eminence and power, when one outside the pale stands up and proclaims a common truth, a common need, a common Father's love, a light which lighteth every man, a home which is open to every returning step, has no parallel in the history of worldly frenzies and hates. "*And the next Sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming.*"—(Acts xiii. 44, 45.) This is a clear exhibition of the spirit which I describe. The passage in Acts xxii. 19—22 shows as clearly how deadly is its hate. And the poor, who know only that they are sinners, and who watch wearily for any crumbs of divine comfort or gleam of divine hope which their saintly tyrants may condescend to cast to them, repay it at last with as intense a hate. I suppose that the Italians hate, or did hate, a priest much as the poor hated a Pharisee in Jerusalem. For these men dangle the

key of the gate of the kingdom within the clutch of the despairing wretches, and dash them back when they touch it, into the lairs of misery and despair. And this, brethren, is the spirit which hath no forgiveness. The sin which saith, "I have no sin," remaineth; even against God's love it is hard as adamant, and cold as death. The Pharisee's spirit, which would dash fiercely the cup of life from the lips of a dying world, lest its own privilege should perish; which would brand the spirit of the Divine Healer, Teacher, and Saviour of the world as devilish, and hunt it from the earth, stung to death with its viperous fang; which holds every wide Gospel proclamation an intolerable insult, and every healing touch of divine love a bitter pain; it is this, brethren, and nothing which a poor lost soul can brood over in its anguish, which is the unpardonable sin. This was the Python on which the sun-bright Saviour rained the arrows of His indignation and hate. "*Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how shall ye escape the damnation of hell?*"

The man whose lusts and passions are levelling him to the brute, heaven has hope of to the uttermost; but even the merciful Saviour abandoned as hopeless the man who was hardening himself into the fiend.

I will not attempt to apply the subject to men, parties, and organs in our own day. Perhaps,

if sermons do not apply themselves, the preacher may spare his pains. But there may be those here whom this unpardonable sin haunts as a spectre ; indeed, it is the worst nightmare of souls. But if the cry, "*Father, I have sinned,*" be the true cry of your spirit ; if the soul within you goes forth in the common confession, "we have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep ;" if you would rather stand there with the publican, beating upon your breast and saying, "*God be merciful to me a sinner,*" than go down to your house self-justified like the complacent Pharisee ; get rid of the burden from your heart, the unpardonable sin is far enough from your sphere. But if the thought is rising in your wicked heart ; "*God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are,*" if you are beginning to catalogue your virtues and to realise a property in your principles, if you are tempted to claim for yourself or your class even a partial monopoly of God's spirit, if a free Gospel irritates your jealousy, if you see the throngs around the gate of the kingdom with a secret anger or scorn ; if the breadth of God's Word is becoming contracted and its range of claim and invitation limited in your narrow and selfish thoughts, if a soothing feeling has stolen into your heart that you are the qualified critics of the truth, the licensed dispensers of the grace, the lawful organs of God's

light and love ;—then beware ! beware ! The viper's poison is already at work. Alas ! the spirit still reigns among us, and ever, as of old, its chosen organs are to be found among the saints and doctors of the Church.





Sermon IX.

On Restoring a Sinner.

“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness ; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.”—GAL. VI. 1.

“**B**RETHREN,” is of right emphatic here. The brotherhood of men in Christ lies at the root of the duty here enjoined, and the power to fulfil it loyally must come forth from the same spring. Brethren, “*bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.*” “The Church a brotherhood” is a word full of the most blessed promise for man. Two great thoughts have haunted him in all ages—“God my Father;” “man my brother.” These ideas are rooted in the common nature wherein we are one ;

and the effort to hold and to unfold them, through the dark confusions in which sins and lusts involve us, is the great struggle of the world's life, and, let us hope too, of yours and mine.

"God my Father." Man cannot shake off the belief that this is the great reality of his existence; the truth wherein he lives, and moves, and has his being as a man. "And yet," he is tempted to say, "how awfully stern is all that I know of Him. How pitilessly His law condemns me, how mercilessly His lictors wield the scourge." The sense that a Father's wise and loving method rules it all, matures but slowly. Through long nights of weeping and days of strain we come to understand it, and the great lesson, the greatest of all lessons—God my Father—is learned at last.

"Man my brother." Harder yet to realize, in such a sin-rent, passion-torn world as this. And yet it is a truth, as profound and vital as the other, out of which it springs. There is not one of the mighty movements which have stirred the world's great heart—rebellions, revolutions, reformatations, whatever be their name—which has not borne to the front, and made legible and audible to all, this great truth—the brotherhood of man. It was the master-note in the tocsin of the first French Revolution. Men screamed it frantically, even over the scaffolds whence human blood ran thickly

as that of beasts in shambles. They were the foes of universal brotherhood, whom the mad leaders of a madder mob believed that they were sweeping out of their way. It was a dream, and like all such dreams, costly to the dreamers, and cruel to their victims; but it led the most mighty movement of modern times. While the very substance whose shadow they were madly pursuing was there, close by them, in the brotherhood of the great Elder Brother, who, "seeing that the children were partakers of flesh and blood, Himself also took part of the same;" in whom we become one with that great family whose brotherhood links earth with heaven, and expands time into eternity.

But what have we to do with the brotherhood of humanity here? This surely is spoken of a select society, quite out of the world, and called to bear witness against the world; to condemn the world's selfish violence by its own patient charity, and by the contrast of its life to make the world's judgment more just and sure. Thus a Jew would have conceived of it. The Jew had come to believe that this was what his own Church existed for; and there were Christians in the Apostolic Church terribly tempted to transfer the notion, and to regard the Church as occupying the room of the Israel after the flesh, in the estimation of Heaven, on the one hand, and in its relations to the

wide human world, on the other. And the idea lives on.

“We are a garden walled around,”

is a canticle which is not yet obsolete in the Church. But perhaps there is no idea more radically unchristian than the exclusive view of the end for which the Church exists. There is no greater treason against Him, of whom the Church is the fulness, than the notion that He came purposely on an errand of selection—to pick some jewels out of the world's dust-heap, while He left the rest carelessly to be fuel for the eternal fires. He came to assert that what the devil had made a heap of refuse to every eye but His, was all precious, was all capable of being purged from its dust and dross, and of shining again with gem-like lustre, when set in a Redeemer's crown. The Church in its true idea is, I think, not the contrast, the counterfoil, to the world which Christ has redeemed, but its exemplar. Not the elect host called forth to fight the Lord's battles against the great world of the devil's liegemen; but rather like the *élite* regiments of an army, the conspicuous key of its organization, and example of its evolution: what they *do*, the whole force must strive to imitate; what they *are*, the whole force must strive to become. The duties and relations of Church brethren are the eminent heights of the duties and relations of

human brethren. The same divine thought runs through them all; but in the Church they are lifted into the light, and made conspicuous by the Celestial Sun. The Christian parent, brother, friend, is just the perfect human parent, brother, friend. All that is truly and substantially human, is but the pattern of that which is Divine. In the Church this divineness is known and honoured; its life is set intelligently to a celestial key. It is "the prerogative instance," to borrow Lord Bacon's term, of the truly human life. Set apart, set on high, it is set to shine. Like all that is grand and beautiful, and that seems to live under privileged conditions in nature, the Church is the reflector of a Divine light, the conductor of a Divine fire; like the planets that radiate the great solar lustre as they pilgrim through the midnight darkness of the world. One sun makes many, charged to diffuse his lustre; and the one sun of the higher system, fountain of all Divine light and fire, wherever his beams find a focus, creates a new satellite, a new sun, to drop his radiant warmth on the darkness and deadness of some inferior sphere. Christ is spoken of as "the fulness of God." "*In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.*" The Church in like manner is the fulness of Christ. "*The Church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.*" Why did it "*please*

the Father that in Him all fulness should dwell?" That He might Himself behold it and rejoice in it, or that He might impart it to the world? St. John shall answer:—" *And of His fulness have we all received, and grace for grace.*" And it pleased the Son, that in the Church, His body, His fulness should dwell. Again I ask, why? That He might see it and rejoice over it; that He might call it His own, and reckon so much saved out of a wreck which threatened to be utter; or that He might show it, and shower floods of light, of life, of love, through it, on the darkness and deadness of the world? All the voices of the Scripture and of the universe have but one answer to that question: "*Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich.*" "*Freely ye have received, freely give.*" "*Go ye out into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature.*" "*And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me.*"

Whatever, then, is urged on Church members as a duty, on grounds which they only can fully understand, would seem to be the unveiling of some universal human duty, of which the Church is to show the pattern; to fulfil which man was made, and in fulfilling which alone man can be blest. The truth is, that humanity was made to be Christian. All is false and discordant, "like sweet bells jangled,

out of tune and harsh," until the law of human living, which Christ developes, and which the Church is set to realize, becomes the law of the great human world. If an apostle says to the members of the brotherhood of the Church, "*Bear ye one another's burdens,*" and enforces it by the consideration "*ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,*" he means to say that it is the duty of every man to bear his brother's burden, because for his sake, He who was rich became poor. He means us further to understand that until that is seen to be the true law of living in any human circle, home, fellowship, or nation, in that circle, home, or nation, humanity, instead of living tolerably after a lower and selfish law, is literally not living, but has in it the power, and over it the shadow of death. By the Church, God is saying, not, there is a little company of men in the world to whom a higher life is possible than is possible to the great human mass; but, see in that little company the true pattern of living for the great human mass, and believe that the power by which they live it is yours as freely as it is theirs, that it is there in Christ within touch of your hand.

We believe in the Christian Church, but not in the Christian caste—the Christian Brahmun, separated utterly in dignity and destiny from the great brotherhood of mankind. If the life of God is in a man, it is not to separate him

from his brother men, but to bind him to them more closely, in the bands of a self-denying, self-sacrificing love.

It is the old question of the miracle, in another form. Much as the miracle stands related to the whole course of the Divine procedure in nature, the life of the Church stands related to the whole life of the human world. A miracle is a revelation, a sign of a thing unseen ; even of that Almighty hand which under the veil is ever ruling the forces and maintaining the order of Nature. When the Lord lifted Himself from the pillow on which He was calmly sleeping, hushed by the storm, "*and rebuked the winds and the sea, and immediately there was a great calm,*" He did not mean us simply to understand that there was One there stronger than the tempests which had lashed to white fury those blue Galilean waters, and that therefore while He was present they were safe under the shield of His hand. It meant—that calm sleep on the bosom of the storm, that majestic "Peace, be still," when His trembling friends were cowering to His side—"There is One here in visible presence whose invisible presence has ruled these waters from the beginning of creation to this hour ; whose Hand it is now given to you to behold in storm, in calm, in midnight gloom, in sunset glow, in golden dawn ; in all the beauty, in all the terror, which mingle

their tones in the many-coloured mantle of the world." From that time forward the vision of a restraining Hand would ever gleam forth, when they watched the tempests gathering their force in the wild ravines of the mountains, and sweeping down with banner of mist unfurled, to press their yoke upon the sullen sea, whose black waves with their ghastly hissing lips of foam shrieked back defiance to the storm. I say, they would see the Hand in all such hours, and no faithless murmur, "*Lord, carest thou not that we perish?*" would again break from their lips. And when the mandate "Peace, be still," had again gone forth, and the morning sunlight flashed its smile over the golden rippling sea; and when, as hot noon drew on, the lazy clouds dropped purple shadows over the glowing mist of waters; and when the evening breeze stole down from the hills with dewy freshness, and the cold shimmer of the moon chased the hot glow of sunset from the waves, and lit the weary fishers home to their repose; an unseen Presence would unveil itself in all this beauty and splendour, and they would know that this, too, was the benediction of the hand of the Lord.

And I read here of a brotherhood constituted, as it were, by the miraculous act of Christ. I read of duties which the brethren owe to each other, of the motive which is to inspire them, of the ground on

which, and the strength by which, those duties are to be done ; and I am quite sure that I have here a revelation of the essential nature of all brotherhood, —the duties which it involves, the grounds on which they rest, and the mind in which alone they can be faithfully fulfilled. I am quite sure that this instinct and craving for brotherhood, which is characteristic of the human everywhere, must come hither to learn its lessons, and to be developed into a true human brotherly love. And I think that there is one great principle developed in the text, which lies at the root of the whole matter. This “brotherhood” has been the passionate dream of man through all the ages, and it lies nearer than we deem to the heart of all the great movements whose tramp has shaken the solid world. But no actual brotherhood has grown out of the dream. The dream has been dreamt, but it has left no substance behind it ; it has bequeathed no legacy but disappointment and despair. “Let us be brothers, let us embrace and fraternize,” has been the loud cry of man in every era of storm and revolution ; and men *have* been brothers after such fashion ; they *have* embraced and fraternized, they have laughed and wept for very joy, and then, when the ink was yet wet on their charters of fraternity, they have dashed at each other’s throats. Read the history of the feasts of fraternity, and the feast of

blood, the Reign of Terror, in which they issued, in that most masterly of all our histories, Mr. Carlyle's French Revolution, if you doubt the truth of my words.

“Brethren !” The word means something on the Apostle's lips. Something brotherly had been not only talked of, but done in our world. (Read Acts ii. 41—47; iv. 33—37; xi. 27—30; 1 John iii. 10—19.) And where is the broad contrast between the dreams which men have sought frantically to substantiate, and the reality of brotherhood which is freely offered to us by Christ in the Gospel. The one springs out of sentiment, the other roots itself in duty ; the one seeks pleasure of intercourse, the other occasion of ministry ; the one is content to be a passion, the other knows itself to be a power ; the one will weep copious tears over a brother's sorrows, the other with brave strong hand will lift a brother's burdens and bear them away ; the one builds an altar of incense, the other an altar of sacrifice ; the one draws its inspiration from a selfish passion, the other from the loving deeds of the Elder Brother, who laid down His life for us all. That which is of God starts from duty ; even as the Highest came not to delight Himself in His world but to die for it, and to find beyond long agony the fruit of His travail, in such love as sacrifice only can win.

The world is full of clamours about human rights—rights of men, rights of women, rights of subjects, rights of workmen, rights of servants, rights of slaves. Has it ever struck you that there is not a word about these wonderful rights in the Bible? I read there of the duties of men, the duties of women, the duties of subjects, the duties of workmen, the duties of servants, the duties even of slaves—even as the Lord came to earth to assert no right, though all right was His, but to fulfil the behest of duty, and to sheathe His claims, as it were, in soft bands of ministry and love.

And here we are on the track of one of life's deepest and most blessed truths. Parent, brother, sister, friend, would you win the joy that springs out of those blessed relationships, "*Deny thyself, and take up thy cross,*" and it shall be thine. Snatch at the joy—claim it, insist on rights, guard them jealously, refuse to share them—the joy eludes you. Seek how you may minister, see what burden you can lift, what sorrow you can share, what fault you can pardon, what sin you can cover, what help you can bring, and there will be a love springing up there which death can but transfigure, and which will bear riper and richer fruit, age by age, through eternity. Those will read these words, I doubt not, who know something of this. Mothers, sisters, who have fought the battles, and borne the burdens

of some prodigal, who, through their long agony of effort, has grown into their heart of hearts, and from whom they have won a love which has a tinge of almost worship in it, which is their rich, their abounding reward.

Brethren, these are the true prizes of life. Beside these your golden successes look but dim. Be not afraid to win them, to wear them. Be not afraid to let your loves and your hopes go cross-bearing through life; they, too, like Christ's, will wear crowns in heaven.

Thus much on brotherhood, its grounds, its burdens, its joys.

The one great canker of brotherhood is sin. The schism in the human unity was made, as Milton finely expounds, when man's heart went astray from God:—" *In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother. For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.*"—(1 John iii. 10—12.) Every act of sin makes the rent wider, because it sunders man more widely from God. Strike out the centre from a balanced system, a sun from the midst of his planets, and the confusion is complete. And discord must

reign in the realm of sin. The only cure of the enmity of man against man is the cure of the enmity of man against God. He who came to re-found the brotherhood which sin had shattered, saw the heart of the mischief. He began to draw men to each other, by drawing them to God in Himself. He charged them with duties and ministries to each other, of which He had given them, not the pattern only, but the principle. He asked of them, for their brethren, the ministries which He had a right to claim of them for Himself, and which He had Himself freely offered unto them:—"So after He had washed their feet, and had taken His garments, and was set down again, He said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them."—(John xiii. 12—17.) That love which He sought to win from them is sin's destroyer, sin being the destroyer of human love. The brotherhood of the Church was the brotherhood of men who believed that sin, the destroyer of human, was destroyed by Divine

love. They vowed themselves in love to Christ to struggle against sin, when they vowed themselves to each other. They were sure that when sin reared its hateful form in their fellowship, there would be a breach in their unity—a schism which, if the sin were tolerated, would grow wider, until it rent the community to fragments. And so they recognised this as their primal duty:—“ *Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.*”

This restoring of sinners is the primary duty of the members of the brotherhood of Christ. Is it not, too, the great problem of society. It lies as near to the heart of the welfare of homes, of kingdoms, as of Churches. Restore the sinners and you save the State. It is the fundamental social question. It lies under all our most searching Reformations; it is hardly touched by our most radical Revolutions. It eludes the grasp of the statesman; it is but feebly handled by the priest. But so near to the heart of the welfare of empires does it lie, that he who can turn a sinner from the error of his ways, and restore a soul in the spirit of meekness, earns, more richly than statesmen or conquerors, the civic crown.

I. The man overtaken in a fault.

It is literally the man “even caught in a sin.”

Putting the case most strongly, ye which are spiritual, restore such a one, despite the open scandal and shame. The sense of our translation, "overtaken in a fault," suggesting, I think, the idea of surprise *by* the sin as well as *in* the sin, though not the literal sense of the original, is, perhaps, spiritually not far from the truth. The word for "sin," the word for "restore," and the allusion to temptation, seem all to point to the case of a man overtaken and snared by a sin. In a sense, this is the true history of sin: man in Eden was sought out by a tempter and snared. We have here the case of a Christian brother; a man who believes in righteousness; a man who does not believe in his heart of hearts the devil's lie—who has a brightness within him against which the sin looms darkly, who has an uprightness there which a loving hand may restore. There are those, alas! who overtake sins; whose inmost soul searches, and is athirst for them, at least as far as the soul is awakened; there may be something deeper, some witness for God, latent even there, which one day will rise up, and lay, at any rate, the refuge of lies, the belief that sin is the good, that Satan is the God, in ruins in the dust. But they seem to catch sins as eagerly as the vapour of naptha catches fire. They spread an atmosphere around them which kindles the faintest spark into a devouring flame. I do not know how

you can restore such. If the bent of their souls is thus madly towards evil, I do not know that you can do much to help them. God can restore them, but after long miseries. Saved, so as by fire, charred, maimed, bare ; but saved. God grant that none of you may challenge that discipline. It is a fearful thing for such an one to fall into the hands of the living God.

But there are those whom sin overtakes. It is out of the course of their most earnest purpose. It comes as a perversion. It twists, if it does not break, the unity of their lives. David's deadly sin was of this character. Take that man's whole life course and you will see how utterly adultery and murder were out of the true line of it. They wrenched him aside from the high aim of his life. Such a man may yield himself to a temptation readily, as if his whole soul were in it, the more desperately because of the utter subversion of all his habits and principles which it involves—just as the strongest sluice when burst lets in the fullest tide—but it is sin to him. Paint it to him as Nathan painted it to David, and his soul will rise up in judgment against it. “As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die.” Listen to him in his calm moments ; he moans and writhes. “*Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness : according unto the multitude*

of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions : and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight : that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest."—(Psalm li. 1—4.) It may be worse with him than this. He may see no way of escape from it ; he may say within himself, "I can never break the spell." He feels himself afloat on a swift current, the oars of his resolution are powerless to stem it, but he knows full well that it is floating him to perdition. He has visions of a higher life which a man might live and be blest. Ask him what he longs for in his best moments in his heart of hearts, and he will answer, "Free me from this : if this vile body is in fault, kill it ; if this weak heart, purge it, no matter how fierce the fire ; but give me strength to live the life that seems to me so beautiful, so heavenly, on which my thoughts fasten, while the song of the Siren wiles me away." That man is no reprobate, though, as with David, reprobates might tremble at his sin. The fault has found him. The flesh, the mind, in a careless hour, have sent forth their tentacles of lust, and have grasped a prize. But it oppresses him ; he is restless, moody, wretched.

Like Launcelot, in the "Idylls of the King," mars his life, and he knows it.

"Another sinning on such heights with one,
The flower of all the west, and all the world,
Had been the sleeker for it."

Not so he. Sin has caught him, and holds him a captive. But there is an uprightness there which it has bent but has not prostrated, a love for truth and honour which it has blighted but has not killed. Brethren, take him by the hand and clasp him. Throw the cords of your love around him, and stay him in his mad career. *"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted."*

II. Ye which are spiritual.

Who are the spiritual? Who knows the secret of this divine art of restoring souls? I suppose that in any community of professed believers there will be those who will prick up their ears at once when the word "spiritual" greets them, and say to themselves, "This concerns me; here is plainly something with which I have to do. Spiritual is what I strive and pray to be, and in some measure I am thankful that I realize it. I know but little thank God, of these storms and struggles of the tempted; heavenly things occupy my mind, heavenly exercises and contemplations are my delight. Pious

conversation, pious literature, pious observances, make up my world. If any have fallen into sin, my superiority to temptation, my separation from the world, my Christian attainments, will help me, will enable me to restore them, to bring them, thoroughly humbled, to repentance and confession, and point out to them afresh the narrow path." The spiritual—those who know that they are the spiritual, and who are the qualified teachers, correctors, and exemplars to their fellow-men.

I am not sure that this is the class which is meant by the term, when we hear it on an Apostle's lips—indeed, I am quite sure that it is not. I am quite sure that Paul speaks of a class of much simpler and humbler men. Men who are not at all sure that they are the spiritual ; men who are only sure that sin is a great sorrow to the sinner, a great sorrow to the Saviour, a crushing burden on the spirit, which so fills them with distress and pity, that they can take no rest and know no joy until they have lifted it and borne it away. Men on whom another's burden, a burden of shame and sorrow which has bowed down some poor despairing brother to the dust, presses heavily as their own ; who have looked into the conditions of His life, who "*Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses,*" and who find some dim image of it in their own hearts. The men and the women

in a church who are so spiritual, that they are conscious of stooping from a great height to touch the sinner in the depth—a height to which, they thank God, these low and base temptations never climb—had better stay there, and leave the work of restoring sinners to those who know, too sadly, that the devil is as near to them as to the poor fallen one, and that it is by hard battle, through grace abounding daily, that they keep themselves out of the same pit. They can see the brother's image in the sin as well as in the suffering, and feel, as the Lord did, that the poor lost sheep is the one whom it is worth any sacrifice to save.

I think this is what Heaven calls "spiritual." It is to be something like Christ, to whom publicans and sinners drew near, as a sick child draws near to the shelter of a nurse's bosom, while the whole—the spiritual, as they called themselves—stood apart in contemptuous pride. There were two once in the presence of the Saviour. The one a righteous man and a just ; a man who had a right, as men judge, to hold his head high among his fellow-men—one of the recognized spiritual of his time ; the other, a crushed and broken thing, of no account with any but with Christ, who was learning the first lessons at any rate of that love which makes us spiritual in the estimation of heaven. It is worth while to read the narrative again in this connection.

(Luke vii. 36—50.) I have already made it the topic of a discourse, and dwelt with special emphasis on the moral of it, "She loved much, for she had much forgiven." Brethren, ye who are spiritual, who have had much forgiven, and who love much, if you see a poor crushed sinner who has been overtaken in a fault, afraid to lift up his head in any Christian company, afraid to claim lest he should shame, the Christian name, feeling himself a dishonoured outcast from all holy fellowship, and tempted to believe—and this is the devil's crowning victory—that He who is the Head of all holy fellowship has outcast him too, ye who are spiritual, ye whose heart is tender, whose hand is healing, like Christ's, "*restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.*"

I feel it profoundly important to insist on this truth, that the spiritual in the church must be those who are in closest sympathy with the spirit of Him who came into this world that He might draw sinners to Himself. This was the spirit of the Redeemer's mission; that must be spiritual which is most deeply imbued with this spirit, and which is able to work out most fully this mission of the Saviour to the world. The spiritual are those who can take God's view of sin—the view which expressed itself in the gift of Christ. A hatred of

sin, a horror of sin, so utter that the heart of the God-man literally broke under the reproach of the sin which He voluntarily assumed ; joined with a love, a sympathy, a pity, for the race which sin had overtaken, and plunged into innumerable woes, so profound and tender that He bore for them willingly the burden under which His heart was breaking, that those who were crushed by it might arise and live. A hatred of sin which, far from hardening into a lofty contempt for sinners, drew Him down to the sphere of their temptations ; that, as a tempted man—one who could be touched with the feeling of their infirmities, and had like themselves to learn obedience by suffering—He might place Himself at their side.

So intense was His hatred of sin, that He could not spare one sinner to be buried in its slime and lost in its pit to God and the universe for ever—that He held His own most precious blood to be not too dear a price to pay to rescue sinners from sin's fell bondage, and leave Satan spoiled of victims, while the house of God was filled with sons. Ye that are spiritual, ye that stand beset, like Christ, with temptation, who agonize daily in the battle-field in which your poor brother fell, who hate sin with such Christ-like intensity, that to see a human soul its victim is a bitter pain, to snatch a human soul from its chain a blessed and glorious victory

—ye that are spiritual, to whom a soul in darkness turns with quick instinct, and cries, if but with the dumb prayer of pain, for aid, “*If a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.*”

III. Restore such an one.

Restore him. There is but one way. Restore him to God, and you restore him to his brother, to the Church, and to himself.

1. Do not imagine that *you* can restore him. Man can do just one essential service to his brother: he can bring him to Jesus, and leave him with Him. The highest are but ministers, to set the soul before God, and God before the soul. “Readjust,” “refit,” is the precise meaning of the word. That is, readjust the man’s divine relations, and the rest will fall into the true order at once. The danger is, in our endeavours to restore a soul from sin, lest we aim at too much. The best service is to bring him to Jesus, and leave the rest with Him. You may have formed strong convictions as to the nature of the transgression. You could discourse long and ably on the theme, to bring your brother to a humbling sense of his fault. Beware lest it be your righteousness, the right as it seems to *you*, rather than God’s righteousness, as God can show it to *him*, with which you are seeking to readjust him:

beware lest you be seeking, under specious guise, a victory rather than a soul. Beware, above all, of homilies on transgression. Be sure that God is reading to him a sterner homily than any that can fall from your lips ; or if not, yours will be worse than useless. There is but one thing in the universe which can convert him—the vision of the Cross. Restore him. Don't crush him, lift him ; lift him, as Jesus lifted that heart-crushed woman whose sorrow broke in a rain of tears at his feet ; or like the Good Shepherd, who, having lost one sheep, left the ninety and nine and went after the lost one until He found it, and lifting in His arms, laid it on His shoulders rejoicing, and brought it home.

The Father's grief, the Saviour's pain and sorrow, these are the great forces in the hand of the Spirit, whereby he that is of the Spirit, he that is spiritual, may convince and restore souls. The great matter, the greatest, is to get a fallen brother or sister to believe that the very intensity of the Righteous Father's hatred against sin, is the measure of His sorrow that a soul should be ensnared by it, should be befouled by its stains, and buried in its pit—that every act, every thought of continued transgression is a fresh and shameful question of the earnestness of that purpose of Redemption which sealed itself on Calvary, a fresh wound to the tenderness of the Father's and the Saviour's love. The most admirable exhor-

tations, the most clear expositions of the duties which have been neglected, or the injury which has been inflicted, will be powerless in comparison with the thought, that you have grieved and wronged a love which clings to you more tenderly at this moment of sin and wretchedness, because you most need its ministries, which receives fresh wounds each moment that you harden yourself against it in pride and impenitence, and will receive the last and sharpest wound that you can inflict, if you break away from its pleadings, and refuse to believe that its best and most joyous welcomes await your return.

The tenderness of the love of God in Christ to the wretchedest sinners, yea to the rebellious also, though the Church has been talking and the world has been hearing of it for eighteen centuries, is all unfathomed still. The meaning of Calvary has yet to be explored. Could we make that love to sinners which inspired the prayer, "*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do,*" glow in our words and tremble in our tones, the Church had long ere this restored a sin-lapsed world. It is the one over-mastering power everywhere, the tale of Calvary—the one triumphant antagonist of sin. To the worst reprobates on earth, could my voice reach them, I would cry, "Care for yourselves, for Christ cares for you; save yourselves, for Christ is saving you; conquer this sin, for it pierces afresh the

Friend who was 'wounded for your transgressions, and bruised for your iniquities,' even unto death. Abandon that sin, for there is One on high who must share the sorrow with which it comes laden ; the misery to which you doom yourself must press as a burden on your merciful Saviour's heart." If that thought will not unseal the fountains of tears, the ablest homilies, the sternest denunciations, are vain.

Brethren, ye which are spiritual, ye who can enter into the mind of Christ about sin, and make sinners understand the measure and the quality of His love, bear ever His charge in mind, "*As my Father hath sent me into the world, even so send I you.*" There are a thousand enterprises, a thousand missions, on which the world can send its children. Christ, in the Church, has but one—to seek and to save the lost. Be ye His helpers. Spend, yea, be spent, in the enterprise to which, unseen, all Heaven is assistant, and whose fruits outlast eternity. Live for the help of souls, in their struggle against evil ; live to deepen their faith in the force of the redeeming love of God. And if—for

"The Son of God, in doing good,
Was fain to look to heaven and sigh ;
Nor can the heirs of sinful blood
Seek joy unmixed in charity"—

cross-bearing, you have to fulfil that ministry ; if weeping you go forth, bearing that precious seed,

if, as you watch for the harvest of your toils and watch fruitlessly, the hands hang down, the heart fails, the spirit faints, and is ready to abandon its mission in despair, remember the long-suffering patience and hope of Christ—remember what He sees, and you cannot see, of the harvest of His toil and pain beyond the river of death, and go forth to your work re-inspired. “*They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He which goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.*”





Sermon X.*

And yet there is Room.

"Come, for all things are now ready." "And yet there is room."—LUKE xiv. 17, 22.

THIS is but one of the many touching and beautiful forms in which the Saviour seeks to set forth the freeness and largeness of His Gospel, and to make the sin-sick, life-weary throngs around Him understand that His love, His life, was no private gift to a company of select expectants, but God's public gift to the broad human world. Oh! the wistfulness of some of those eager eyes that were bent on the Saviour; the pining hunger of some of those hearts which were waiting for the crumbs that might fall from His

* This Sermon was preached to a very large audience of the poorest of the poor. I have not altered it, but note the fact as an explanation of some of the special allusions.

bountiful hand! But had they any right to touch them? What could the kingdom of heaven have to do with such beggared, bankrupt, God-forsaken lives as theirs? For generations, such as they had been drilled into the belief that the kingdom of heaven was the guarded domain of the orthodox, reputable, and world-honoured Pharisees, and that they, the publicans and harlots, the scum and offscouring of all things, were scum in God's sight as well as man's, and needed simply to be swept out. And when they found that the Son of Man, instead of driving them into more utter darkness, loved to see them crowd round His purity, and touch the hem of His heavenly virtue and might, it broke up the fountains of the great deep within them, it melted the rude rock of their hearts, it drew them in throngs round His pathways, it bowed them in a passion of tender devotion at His feet. They bathed them with their tears, they covered them with their kisses, and they shouted, as they attended His triumphal progress through the streets of Jerusalem, "*Hosanna, Hosanna, blessed be this King who cometh in the name of the Lord!*"

For, in truth, it was the first time that any such King had been seen on earth, and the first time that any large and lasting benediction had reached the poor. Benign words had been spoken from on high—there was the echo of them still linger-

ing in the air—but the wise, the noble, the mighty, the self-styled holy of this world had intercepted and engrossed them. “They are for us—the worthy—these good words of God; the kingdom of heaven is our express domain. God is seeking a select company to serve Him, to be honoured with His commands, invited to His fellowship, and admitted to dwell in His palace halls on high. This class he has found—we are the men. Stand by, we are holier than thou. There is a broad line of distinction to be drawn, a line which God recognizes as well as man, in point of culture, manners, and morals, between us and you, who were altogether born in sins—a people not knowing the law—the helots of the heavenly kingdom—the hewers of wood and the drawers of water to the Lord’s true congregation for ever.”

They were right. There *was* a broad line of demarcation between the two great classes; the Pharisees and the Publicans, the Scribes and the sinners, the rulers and the mob, the luxurious lords and the dog-licked beggars who lay whining at their gates. There was a broad distinction. They were right again, for the Lord recognized it as well as man, and the Lord remembered it when He sent His Son to cast in His lot with the toiling, suffering masses, and share with them the priests’ malignity and the rulers’ scorn; and when He rang

that warning into their startled ears which has been so terribly sustained by their history, "*Verily, verily, I say unto you, the publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of heaven before you.*" Yes, God remembered the distinction which for ages they had been drilling into the minds and hearts of the great company of the poor. God remembered it, and *they* remember it now. "*There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, and ye yourselves thrust out.*" The most damning sin in God's sight, and that which He avenges most fearfully, is the making the gate of the kingdom of heaven, whether by doctrine or conduct, too narrow for the great masses of mankind. This was *the* condemnation of the Pharisaic school—that having the keys of the kingdom of heaven, they neither entered themselves, nor would suffer the throngs to come near the gate. We will look more closely at

I. The scene and circumstance of this parable:—"*And it came to pass, as He went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees to eat bread on the Sabbath day, that they watched Him.*"

It was a grand banquet, at the house of one of the chief men of the State. The rich Jews held sumptuous Sabbath-day banquets, like another people, not unlike the Jews in genius and con-

viction, and with a great name for holiness, in these modern days. Indeed, it was their great day for dining out. It is but fair, however, to say that the custom probably arose out of the need of entertaining those who came up from a distance to attend the worship of the cities; so that originally it would be a banquet chiefly for the necessitous and the poor. This would give point, and, let it be also said, a limit, to our Lord's exhortation in the 12th verse. This was manifestly a specially magnificent entertainment. Contests for upper seats were going on, giving occasion for our Lord's rebuke. I daresay the crowd were allowed to hang about the doors and look in, like dogs watching for the crumbs. As dogs they were treated, and as dogs they probably felt, before these magnates of the kingdom. Their wistful looks struck the Saviour. I think there must have been something especially touching about the aspect of the poor crowd around the gates; something which He thought might draw tears, even from the eyes of a chief Pharisee, if they could be got to look at it, and so He spake these words:—"*When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompence be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind:*

and thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just." One of the guests caught up the phrase: "*the resurrection of the just.*" "Yes!" we can fancy him saying, "that belongs to me, that is a matter about which I have a right to speak." The heavenly kingdom was familiarly conceived of among that class as the scene of a sumptuous banquet; at least, that was to be the first act of the great drama. The notion was founded, probably, on the imagery of Isaiah xxv. 6: "*And when one of them that sat at meat with Him heard these things, he said unto Him, Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God.*" One can readily picture him. A demure Pharisaic saint, a man whose evidences were all perfectly clear, so clear in fact that judgment and the love of God were quite needless additions. His salvation was plainly decreed; why should he vex himself with spiritual conflicts, benign ministries, and the daily burden of the cross? He had all the pious platitudes of his school at his tongue's tip. One of them slipped easily off, as he lifted up his eyes with appropriate fervour—"Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God." His sleek self-satisfaction, his unclouded conviction that whoever might fail, he should be there and feast on the fat things of the heavenly kingdom eternally, drew this parable from

the Saviour's lips. It is terribly stern to all presumptuous Pharisaism, it is benignantly pitiful and attractive to all self-distrustful ignorance and sinfulness, all self-abandoned wretchedness and despair. It is emphatically *the* parable of the kingdom. It is the charter of the poor and outcast; it claims the pariahs of a narrow and selfish human society, as the citizens of the great universal kingdom over which God rules in love. It establishes His relation to even the poorest and wretchedest outcast, trudging with naked and blistered feet along the rough highways, camping under the hedges, sleeping on the door-steps, or moaning in the prisons, of the world. All such, but specially the most wretched, are here called to and claimed for the heavenly kingdom, and yet, though the myriads of the weary and heavy laden have in all ages pressed into it, "YET, THERE IS ROOM!"

This leads us to consider

II. The boundless comprehension of the call. "*A certain man made a great supper, and bade many;*" and first, remember, first, the very men who turned the bidding into scorn.

The guilt of sin, in this and kindred parables, is not the feature which is put foremost, but rather its misery. I may venture to say that in dealing with us, God seldom puts it foremost, save when for us He laid the whole burden on His well-

beloved Son. God sees its misery in *us*; God lays its guilt on Christ. It is as wretched, starving, dying, that He looks on us. There is no aversion, no hate. The guilt which He must hate is there on Christ, borne away into the waste. But pity, profound, unfathomable pity fills Him, as He sees the prodigals wandering further and further into the wilderness, so hungry, so weary, so hopeless of help, that they resign themselves to share the husks and the sties of swine. And He made ready a great supper—the bread of the Father's house, the bread by which the angels live—and sent swift messengers to call them home. *Them!* His prodigals—whom do you mean? I have only one clue. The hungry, the thirsty, the weary, the wounded, the dying, are the “called” everywhere in the Book of God: and just because they are the hungry, the weary, the wounded, the dying. It is just that which touches this great bountiful King. It is the lost sheep which is most tenderly sought; it is the sick child which is most heedfully nursed; it is the starving soul which is most largely fed.

If your hearts were open to this parable you would feel that it is just your neediness which gives you, through grace, the strongest possible claim on His pity, sympathy, and aid: you would plead this as your title-deed—the right which He gives to you in Christ to a place at the Gospel feast, a

mansion in His home on high. But are these "*the many*" in the parable? Was the outcast pagan world called first and at once to share in the bounty and benefaction of the King? No. There is a mystery here which we cannot fathom. We cannot understand fully how there was to be an appointed time; a time, too, far on in the world's history—but not in the history of the universe, perhaps this earth of ours is but the beginning of inhabited worlds—for the gathering in of the Gentile with the Jew to the great feast of the Gospel. It seems a dark mystery—that long pagan night—but we see into it but a little way. The secret things belong unto God. We can measure the visible dispensations, but we know not what ways of God with human souls that darkness veils from sight. We shall understand it one day, when the clear sunlight of heaven falls upon it all, and our cry will be, "O the depth of the riches of His wisdom and His love!"

I believe that the purpose of God in the calling of the Jews thus early was to make them His witnesses and missionaries to the Gentiles, as Joseph, Daniel, and Paul became; and thus not to retard, but to anticipate by ages, the promulgation of His good news to the whole human world. But they would not. They would not even recognise their own want of the blessing. They fed and puffed

themselves with the chaff of privilege, but they would have none of the bread of God, nor should any one else have it. Thus much they had firmly settled. Woe be to any divine messenger who should venture to pass through their coasts on his way to call the starving Gentiles home! Their taste was for the bread of this world. When God spake to them of His banquet, as St. Augustine says, they opened their jaws and not their hearts:—
“And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come. So that servant came, and showed his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.” The streets and lanes are to be ransacked,

the highways and hedges are to be stript of their vagrants, and all are to be brought in. "*Compel them to come in.*" Why? By what right? Because they belong to the King, and his treasures are theirs. The servants had a right to say, laying hold of each poor tramp, harlot, beggar, publican, "Come! my lord has need of thee, and thy need of him and his feast is greater. Come! these squalid rags are not the dress which went with thee from his home, these dirty crusts, these shrivelled husks, are not the bread which he had stored up for thee there, and which had been thine hadst thou remained. No! '*He would have fed thee with the finest of the wheat, and with honey out of the rock would He have satisfied thee.*' Come! Come! put on the wedding garment; a braver robe than the angels wear. Come! satisfy thy hunger at the King's banquet-table; it is richer food than the angels taste. Look on thysqualor, remember thy need, and come!"

The words of the commission are evidently intended to describe the beggars, tramps, and pariahs of human society. The highways and hedges, the courts and alleys! What scenes of filth, squalor, wretchedness, anguish, do the house fronts veil! Open the window and look through. A room smaller than your parlour, and twenty people crammed into it. They lie there in the reeking rags they have worn all day. They steam in the

heat of the room ; the stench sickens, and almost suffocates you. Old men, hoary vagabonds, hardened reprobates, are there ; and young girls, and wives and mothers, and stout lads and children, all curled up there, trying to slumber, as reckless, as ignorant of bare decency as the beasts that perish. The oaths, the obscenities, the blasphemies that are current fill you with a shuddering horror. There are young lives growing up there, poisoned in their innermost springs, rotten to their innermost core. Even well-trained Christian philanthropy is tempted to say, "Here all is rottenness, let it be swept out into the waste." Blessed be God that even to them, in His great name, we can send the invitation. Not into the waste, but into the King's banquet-hall let them be compelled out of their sties and stews, to be clad with the wedding garment, and to sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, children at home again, in the kingdom of God. Wherever men are packed most densely by want and misery, wherever hunger preys most fiercely, wherever vice riots most foully, wherever decency is most dishonoured, and manhood is most discrowned, we are not only permitted, thank God, we are bound to bear the message, and to invite, nay, in the name of God's great love for them, great need of them, to charge them, to compel them, to come in.

The banquet is spread, the hall is lighted, behold all things are now ready. The angels stand attendant to minister to the guests. Guests He must have. Said I not rightly, that He needs *you*? A home must be filled; who should fill it but the sons? Shall God watch and wait for you, while you are halting and hanging back? Let the men with the fields, and oxen, and homesteads, set *them* before the kingdom if they will, but you! What have *you*? What is *your* life? A long, wearing wrestle with misery, a daily burden which you are daily tempted to fling down in despair, a ceaseless hunger, a constant pain. Come! fling off the rags, and put on the wedding garment; throw aside the husks, and feed on the living bread; quit the sty, and enter where you were born to live, a son in the great Father's home on high. You want pardon. Listen to the promise:—"*Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.*" You want righteousness. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and confess Him, and His righteousness is yours. You want power to put down the tempter, and tread the world's blandish-Lord, with whom is everlasting strength, to rescue and to quicken you; take arms from His armoury; take strength from His spirit; take courage from His victories; and see the world, the flesh, and the

devil, which have long tyrannized and tormented you, stricken, writhing, and at last slain, under your feet. "*Come, for all things are now ready.*" "*Come, for yet there is room.*"

III. Let us endeavour to estimate the force of this assurance, which brings home the invitation to each one of us. "*Come, for all things are now ready,*" "*and yet there is room.*"

"Grace no more endures a vacuum than nature," says a shrewd commentator on this passage. The fact that there is room is the very strongest invitation ; those words on God's lips are the mightiest appeal. That there yet is room we shall endeavour to develop under these three aspects of the same great fact, the one fact which meets us everywhere, "the love of God in Christ, which passeth knowledge."

1. There is room in the Saviour's heart.

Till that heart is full, till the largest desires of that love are satisfied, there is not a call only, there is a *claim* on you to come. Rich, educated, and respectable, or thieves, harlots, and outcasts, the call is to all, the claim is on all alike. Because of the human likeness which is not yet obliterated, because of the human faculty which is not yet all squandered, because of the human capacity for divine influence which is not yet all killed, He not only calls you, He claims you, in His heart of

hearts, for there yet is room. Till that heart is satisfied! Think you that it is satisfied yet? Does He see of the travail of His soul and rest in the satisfaction of His desire, the fulfilment of His hope? Look round you. What a world is wrestling, writhing, weeping, sinning, rotting, under the eye of the merciful Saviour; who so loved it in its guilt, and so pitied it in its agony, that He "left those glorious realms and royalties above," to bear its load, to purge its sins, to soothe its anguish, by His own shame, agony, and death. The saving a world inspired that sacrifice:—"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." But let none dare to limit it: "For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved." It was a world's redemption at which He aimed. It was a world's guilt, a world's agony, which He bore upon His spirit. It was a world which, as He drew near to the last scene, and entered the cloud which hung around Calvary, He clasped and drew to His heart. "*And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me.*" And there is room still. Oh! the matchless patience and hope of the Saviour. For nineteen centuries, just the gleanings, just the first-fruits, let us say, of the human generations have yielded Him the

tribute of their love, and afforded Him but the earnest of His joy. And the very class which He sought most eagerly has been well-nigh barred out from His kingdom. The sects have been wrangling around its gate, and have driven the great throng of poor sinners away.

Flesh and blood is the one bond which He recognizes as the basis of His claim. "*Seeing that the children were partakers of flesh and blood, He Himself also took part of the same.*" And lest men should think that it was the finer clay and the blue noble blood which He, the Highest, was thinking of, He went to a manger in the stable of an inn for His cradle, He went to a workman's cottage for His childhood's home. For the rest, that the homeless might find Him a brother, He had no roof to shelter Him, and depended, as no beggar in Judæa depended, on chance ministry for His daily bread. Was there one poor pariah who was hunted out of all reputable fellowship, and who withered under the scornful scowls of rulers and priests? He sought him, and placed Himself by his side, in full front of the malignant bigotry of His time; covering him, if not to the eye of man, at any rate to the eye of God and of the angels, with the robe of His purity and love. The reproach of the publican, the reproach of the harlot, the reproach of the criminal, fell on Him.

There was no depth which He did not fathom, to show what room was in His heart for every penitent; the poorer, the wretcher, the guiltier, the better, for then was Satan most signally despoiled of a victim, and then did God most triumphantly recover a long-lost son. I say there yet is room, while one child of flesh and blood still writhes in the devil's bondage, while one prodigal still stays his gnawing hunger with the food of swine. Come! there yet is room. We ministers of the Gospel are bidden to affirm it. By His agony and bloody sweat, by His cross and passion, by His precious death and burial, by that untold depth of sorrow, by that unutterable mystery of pain, by the omnipotent impulse of that love which bore Him on to the triumphant consummation, we dare affirm that His love is as deep, His sympathy as tender, His call as earnest, His grace as free, to every sinner now listening to these words, as when in the hour of His anguish He plucked the dying thief from the grasp of the destroyer, and bore him, justified and sanctified, to His home in Paradise—the first trophy of His saving power, the first of the willing captives who shall swell with you His triumphal train.

2. There is room in the great Father's home.

The Father is the head of the home. At the root of all His dealings with you lies the fact that

you were once, and are still His child ; prodigal, profligate, contemptuous of His very name, it may be, but His still ; belonging to the home, needed by Him to make it complete. Lay hold on that word " Father," and dare to give full meaning to it ; no other word will be needed to explain how there must be room while you are wandering. No elder son, however immaculate, can fill the place of that young prodigal in the Father's heart. This word alone explains the parable in Luke xv. 3—7. The wandering sheep was a wandering child. A father's love, a father's pity for his prodigal, hungry, naked, and wretched, alone explains the leaving the ninety and nine behind, and seeking the lost one at any cost, till he should find it and bring it home. And the Lord declared the Father to the world. I have spoken of the Saviour's love ; measure the Father's by His. He bore the cross, He lifted the cup and drained it to the very dregs, it fell empty from His hand on the cold ground of Gethsemane, but the bitterness of it passed into the Father's heart. Tell me, ye who can measure fatherhood, what pangs were borne by the Most Blessed, when the Son fell fainting on the damp ground, with the prayer, "*Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me,*" or sent up that piercing cry from Calvary, "*My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me ?*" and He knew that for

you He might not spare. Is the love which bore that, and gave that for you, already satisfied? Can the Father rest while you are staggering blindly on the road to everlasting darkness and death? Can He look round on the recovered sons and not miss the absent one, without sending many a pitying, longing thought after him, to clasp him, and draw him home again from his drunkenness and harlotry, or the bitter want and misery in which he pines. Take your own fatherhood, motherhood, sisterhood, or brotherhood, to help you to understand the cry of that Father's heart, "there yet is room." Do not misunderstand the matter. Love may be outraged finally. There may come a point where even the wisest, most patient, most loving father is bound to cut off the son from his family, and extirpate each tender memory from his heart. But He has not cut you off. I am bound to affirm that you are not yet outcast. Your place still waits for you. Sin-sick, wretched one, there yet is room.

3. There is room among the blessed ones on high.

"In my Father's house are many mansions." Think you they are all filled? Heaven is large; it is but thinly peopled yet. But what have the denizens of these blest abodes, the clear-eyed, the pure-hearted saints and angels, to do with me, but

to loathe me and cast me out, full as I am of lust, crime, and deformity; sick, wounded, "*from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot, full of wounds and bruises, and putrifying sores!*" That is the Pharisee's scoff, never let it cross your lips. They watched the Saviour once, as the publicans and sinners gathered round Him to drink in His gracious words, and this was the anathema which they hurled at Him, the most poisoned in their poisonous store, "*He keepeth company with publicans and sinners.*" But Jesus carried the cause to a higher tribunal; He appealed from the earthly to the unearthly spectators of the scene. While earth's popular teachers and competent critics were affixing the broad seal of the world's anathema alike to Jesus and to His Gospel, how grandly does He interpose the record of a higher tribunal, and interpret to that mute assemblage the thought of the spiritual world—"Earth mocks at Him who would gather her outcasts, and preach salvation to her forlorn and lost, '*But verily, verily, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God, over one sinner that repenteth.*'" Believe it, brethren. Believe that the whole spiritual world throbs in sympathy with the Father and with Christ. Saints and angels, cherubim and seraphim, watch with rapt expectation the issues of a work which cost so much sacrifice, and expends so much love. It is

the one theme on high ; how heaven is to be filled, filled with the fruits of the Redeemer's travail and the trophies of His grace and love. "*Worthy is the Lamb,*" they sing who have already entered the heavenly mansions ; but the strain halts, the harmony is thin ; heaven still waits for you. Myriad myriads yet are wanted to swell the strain—the great company of those who love much, for they have much forgiven, alone can make the harmony complete. The saints who have gone home are still expectant ; their heaven still lacks its most lustrous ornaments, themselves their purest and most transporting joys. To you, and far on beyond you, the Saviour gazed when He brought forth the world out of the dark womb of chaos, and when He heard in Eden, wailing through the universe, the first moan of a sinner's pain. Beyond the sorrow of that hour, beyond the ages of man's guilt and shame, the Saviour gazed and foresaw the day, when a great company which no man could number, of all nations and kindreds, and peoples and tongues, should stand before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palms in their hands, and crying with a loud voice, "Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever."

He gazes on to it still. To realise that vision, of fill that home, to gather that innumerable

company of blessed ones, was worth the bloody and shameful cross. But if that fail, it is all as shameful waste. Sinner, shall it fail? Will you rob Him of your presence there? Will you rob Him of your song? Will you rob Him of His joy? There is room there, room in the inner circle, room among the first-born around the central throne. And from that throne He pleads; nay He leaves that throne, He puts by that splendour, He wears the nail-prints and the thorn-scars, and the Man of Sorrows stands once more before the gate of your hearts. "*Behold, He stands at the door and knocks.*" Lift up the bars, fling wide the gates, and bring Him in with glad hosannas. He shall lodge here with you through life's brief night, you shall lodge there with Him through the long day of Eternity.

"COME, THEN, FOR ALL THINGS ARE NOW READY." Come with all your rags upon you, the best robe awaits you, the rings, the banquet, and all the expression of the intensest joy. Come! they are watching there the tear which is brimming in your eye, the sigh which is bursting from your heart, with rapt expectation. They see you turning in purpose to the Saviour; they see your trembling steps tottering to His Cross, and their harps already ring forth the prelude of that exulting strain, which will swell at last into the

burst of heaven's most joyous, most triumphant minstrelsy, when the lost prodigal returns, and the ransomed family is complete:—" *These thy sons were dead, but they are alive again ; they were lost, but they are found.*"

And then the travail of creation shall be ended—the patience and the hope of its King. The burden of life shall crush no longer. The pilgrim of the wilderness shall have found his home, the bondsman of sin shall have found his freedom, developed by toil, enriched by pain, immortal by death. The night of sorrow shall be for ever ended, remembered but as the husbandman remembers seed-time when the breeze rustles through the ripening corn. And once more the Voice shall be heard, as when of old it blessed the young creation in its beauty—but charged with a joy whose depth and fulness He only can measure who has borne through the weary ages the burden of such a world as this. Again, the eye of God shall rest on His creation—the new creation, fruit of His travail, child of His pain ; and again the benediction shall fall on it as a glory, and shall rest on it for ever, " **BEHOLD, IT IS VERY GOOD.**"

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